How to Grade Furs

Terence Ruttle

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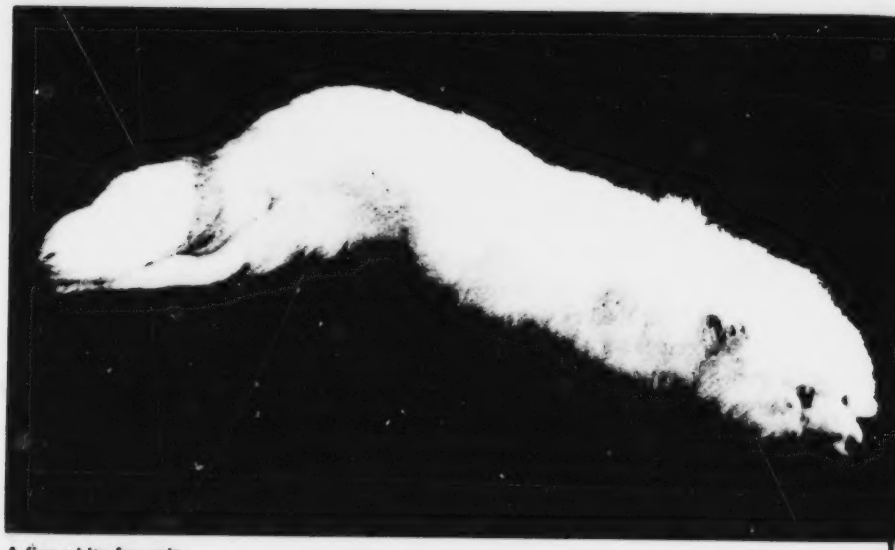
FOREWORD

The Fur Section, Livestock Division, Production and Marketing Branch, Canada Department of Agriculture, acts as a clearing house for information on many aspects of the Canadian fur industry. In addition to serving provincial, as well as other federal departments having responsibilities in this area, the Department of Agriculture works closely with the industry at both the production and marketing levels. It was the interest and responsibilities of the Department with regard to Canadian furs that led to arrangements being made to obtain and publish a manuscript on fur grading written by Terence Ruttle, a recognized authority on the subject.

With his experience of a lifetime spent in the world of furs, Mr. Ruttle is singularly well qualified to write with authority on the subject of fur grading. It is interesting that he, a Londoner, came to choose the fur industry as a calling. His experience dates back to 1924 when he became associated with the Hudson's Bay Company's fur auction operations in London, England. In 1933 he came to Canada to act as technical advisor to Revillon Frères Trading Company, Limited, in which the Hudson's Bay Company had obtained a controlling interest. By this time the fur trade had a firm hold on him and the following years found him associated with many phases of the industry. These included operations as diverse as taking a small schooner into Hudson Strait to establish an Arctic trading post, buying furs at auctions on behalf of overseas clients, and acting as technical advisor to the Canada Mink Breeders Association. He is currently Assistant General Manager of the Edmonton Fur Auction Sales, Limited, Edmonton, Alberta.

The fur industry, in general, and also people whose interest in furs is confined mainly to window shopping and hoping, will welcome this book. In it Mr. Ruttle describes, without undue technical detail, the general principles that govern the grading of the raw skins of wild Canadian fur-bearing animals. Throughout the text are anecdotes of the author's personal experiences, which help to point out the suprising number of factors that affect the value of a furskin.



A fine white fox pelt

WHO WANTS TO BE A FUR GRADER?

Perhaps that question should be answered with another: Who doesn't?

I am constantly amazed at the fascination furs have for the majority of people in Canada and elsewhere.

This applies just as much to men as to women, although from a rather different point of view. It is amazing how many men used to trap as boys, or who visited or lived in the North and came into contact with people involved in the fur trade.

On countless occasions I have found that the mere mention of the fact that I was connected with furs has touched off an avalanche of questions of all kinds about furs, especially such queries as, "How do you tell a good fur? " or "What should I look for in a good fur? "

Certainly anyone who is involved in any way with the fur co-operatives being operated in the North should have some knowledge of the grading of furs; so, also, should every trader or storekeeper who deals in them. Then there is the prime producer, the trapper, and also the fur rancher, each of whom cannot fail to derive benefit from this skill.

At the other end of the scale there is a very real need for information, not only amongst the sales people at the retail level, but even amongst store buyers and the proprietors of fur stores.

Lastly, judging by the enquiries received from the home economics sections of universities, both students and homemakers have a need and a desire for some knowledge of furs and of what constitutes a good grade, or a poor grade, of fur. It is with all this in mind that this book has been prepared.

It is true that it takes many, many years of experience and a great deal of actual handling of furs to become a real expert. Nevertheless it is my sincere belief that anyone who reads and absorbs the contents of this book will be justified in considering that he or she has a good general working knowledge of furs.

WHAT IS FUR GRADING?

I would say that it is the ability to examine a fur pelt of any type and to decide whether it is a very good one, or a good-average, poor-average, poor, or very poor one, and to know what characteristics place a particular pelt in a particular category.

Thus, if a grader has been told that the market on such and such a fur is $20, he will be able to relate this price to the right kind of pelt, and to put a value on other grades in proportion.

Now it is comparatively easy for practically anyone to take 100 pelts of one kind of fur and to divide them up into, say, good, average and poor. It is much harder to look at one or two pelts, without any others to compare them with, and decide to what grade they belong.

The essence of fur grading is knowing how to assess the qualities and defects of the fur pelts in question. At the same time it is the ability to correlate and evaluate any combination of qualities and defects and determine how they affect the use and desirability of the pelts.

Fur grading is one of the most fascinating occupations in the world and although, as I said before, you can acquire a working knowledge of the subject without too much difficulty, no one ever knows all there is to know about it; everyone involved in the business is always learning something new.

In the first part of this book I shall deal with the general principles that control the grading of furs. Later I will discuss different types of Canadian fur and show how the general principles apply to each variety or species.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

There has to be a reason for a fur buyer to pay more for one good pelt of a given type of fur than for a poorer one of the same variety. It is true that occasionally a buyer will get excited at an auction sale and over-bid in his anxiety to obtain certain lots he needs, or even, on occasion, just to beat out a competitor. Nevertheless, in the long run each buyer knows exactly what he is going to use the fur for, and his judgment of value and price is based on suitability and desirability.

Ultimately, all, or nearly all, furs end up in a fur garment or a fur piece, or in fur trimming of some kind or other. There have been times when fur was used for felt hats, shaving brush bristles or other purposes, but today it can be assumed that practically all fur is absorbed by the garment industry. Exceptions are marten or sable tails which, I understand, are still used in fine paint brushes, and sealskins, which are used in the production of many small handicraft items.

A manufacturer is interested in getting as much fur of as good a quality as possible for every dollar he spends. However, it should be pointed out that often, particularly in the United States, providing a fur is good enough for a certain purpose, it is worth no more than a given price even if it is better than average.

Some years ago a man who was making wolf collars was asked what he did with the collars that were rejected as not being of sufficiently good quality. "Oh! That's no problem," he explained, "it only happens when sales of the finished

product are poor. All I do is put the rejects in again with the next batch; if sales have improved, they go through all right without question."

Of course, I am speaking here only of average and good-quality pelts, as most collar manufacturers would not waste their time and labor on really low-grade furs. They would leave them to someone who had a market for cheaper collars.

The same thing applies to the average run of fur garments. Here, however, there is quite a distinct group of first-class manufacturers who require only the finest quality and color for their expensive garment trade and are prepared to pay a high premium for the pelts they need.

These pelts represent only a small percentage of all that are available and, as a result, keen rivalry in bidding often forces prices up quite high on select lots. For example, at a recent auction sale the best lot of XXL beaver sold for $50 a pelt. Yet half a dozen lots of the same size and of only very slightly poorer quality brought only about $34. A few years ago $100 a pelt was paid for the top lot of wild mink males from the northern McKenzie River area; the next best sold for $75. Other lots that were not much poorer realized only about $50 a pelt.

Here, big premiums were paid for especially fine quality and color for the lady customer who is interested only in something that is the very best of its kind. So you see how important it is to know the difference between the best pelts, the fairly good ones and the poor ones.

In fur grading one has to consider quite a number of factors that affect the value of a given fur. These factors do not affect the value, and therefore the grade, of every kind of fur equally.

In one type, size may be most important; in another, color or something else. The relative importance of the various factors does not even remain the same in one given type of fur, since fashions change from year to year. A few years ago a dark marten was worth a great deal more money than a pale one. Today nearly all marten are blended, brushed or dyed, so that there is little difference between the prices of pelts of the same size and quality, regardless of color.

Furthermore, even within one kind of fur, the relative importance of the factors can vary with the grade. For example, in the top grade of wild mink, color is of supreme importance, but once you get into the average grades with more ordinary colors, size and fur quality may become relatively more important.

Now, let us examine the factors that have to be considered in grading. I shall deal with them one by one, in some detail, but not necessarily in order of importance.

Fur in or Out

Broadly speaking, all long-haired furs should have the fur out. This includes fisher, lynx, marten, prairie wolf, timber wolf, wolverine and all types of foxes. Buyers have been accustomed to examining long-haired furs in this way. They prefer to see all the fur, as rubbing and damage to the hair cannot be seen from the

skin, or leather, side. They immediately suspect that there is something wrong if these types of fur are handled skin side out. On the other hand, mink, squirrel and weasel are nearly always handled fur side in and skin out, and buyers are suspicious of any exception to this custom.

The fur of mink, otter, marten and fisher can easily become singed by handling if the fur is exposed, and the color may also fade. In skin-out pelts, buyers figure that they can detect nearly all blemishes and damage from the skin side, and that the skin itself is a good indication of whether the pelt is well furred or not. An experienced man can also tell at a glance whether an animal was caught at the best time of the year. The same applies to squirrel and weasel, though these furs do not tend to fade or become singed. Weasel may yellow, however.

Defects can readily be seen and a pelt judged by the skin. If a buyer sees squirrel or weasel fur side out, he thinks it is probably unseasonable or damaged and has been turned to hide this.

Otter, incidentally, is occasionally handled fur side out, especially if a trapper thinks he has an exceptionally nice pelt. But this is unnecessary – if it is as good as that, the superior quality will not be missed even though the fur side is in.

Buyers inspecting muskrat pelts

The only mink that are generally handled fur out are those from the coast and semi-coast sections of British Columbia, which are poor areas for mink. A few mink still arrive fur out from northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, but

it is really a big mistake on the part of the trappers to ship them like this, as they are much harder to sell at good prices.

Beaver, hair seal and bear pelts are normally handled and stretched "open," as are some badger and timber wolf pelts. This simplifies the scraping process and makes both the fur and the skin easier to examine.

Size

In the early days of the fur trade on the North American Continent, beaver and some other furs were valued and sold by weight.

For convenience in carrying, furs were put into packs of 100 pounds each. A prime large beaver would weigh around 2 pounds when properly scraped so that there would be 50 in each pack. It is interesting to speculate that in those days, when new areas were being trapped for the first time, there were probably more large-sized beaver and each one would actually be bigger than today. We do not hear much of the small sizes, and it is doubtful whether they were bought at all by the traders; they would be unsuitable for beaver hats and were probably either thrown away or used locally for caps and mitts.

Evaluating beaver by weight is not quite so odd as it sounds, as weight is a pretty good indication of quality. Heavy-skinned summer pelts (unprime) with little fur were kept out, together with damaged ones. They were graded as "D & S" or Damaged and Stagey (unprime). The weight of the remainder would actually be a good guide to their quality, since the skin had to be well scraped and free from grease and meat. Even in this century, old-timers have told of using the weight factor as an *additional* means of evaluating bales of muskrat – but that was a good many years ago.

Today beaver are carefully sized. Big pelts are worth more than smaller ones of equal quality, since fewer pelts are required for a coat, jacket or other garment, and labor costs may thus be kept to a minimum.

Large (XXL and XL) beaver pelts are sought after for fur collars, as their size permits the making of two collars out of one pelt. On the other hand, wolf pelts, which are again being used for fur collars for cloth coats in the United States after an absence of many years, are only big enough to make one good collar. It is not really necessary, therefore, to pay a premium for an XL pelt which, with most patterns, will still only make one collar.

Red fox or white fox, being smaller, would make smaller collars, but with them the big sizes are definitely most desirable as they provide the largest area possible for a collar.

Lynx are sometimes big enough for two collars; the cost of the fur in each is then only half the price of a pelt. In Japan, which has suddenly become a very heavy user of red, blue and silver fox, apparently as many as four collars or "collarettes" are made out of one pelt, even from a blue fox, which is comparatively small. However these collars are for kimonos rather than coats.

When squirrel, muskrat, weasel and marten are used in jackets, coats and capes, size is very important since the area each pelt will cover controls the number of pelts that have to be used for a given size of garment. This, of course, affects the cost of the labor required to make the garment.

In mink, especially ranched mink, we have a variety of interesting situations. In the old days manufacturers used to calculate that it took 40 males and 20 females to make a full-length mink coat – the males were used for the body and the females for the sleeves. This was ample for a loose-fitting garment with beautiful ripples.

In recent years, with cheaper garments being shorter and having less ripple, far fewer pelts per garment are being used. There has been a tendency to use regular-size males for both the body and the sleeves of coats and to use females for jackets and similar articles. Extra-large male mink have sold at a high premium in the last few years, since it is possible to make a stole from very few of these pelts. Even now that stoles are supposed to be less fashionable, large sizes in mink are in much greater demand than the others.

Practice differs from country to country, however. Italy for years bought practically nothing but males for all purposes, but is now taking some females for jackets. Females, which of course are much smaller than males, used to sell for approximately 60 percent of the price of males. If a male brought $20, a female would bring around $12, and so on. Later, females sold for only half the price of males, but for quite a few years now they have been back to 60 percent, and sometimes they cost within a few dollars of males. This is because females are being used for small garments and for small collars for sweaters. The size of the pelt just fits these small patterns and the depth of fur is just right, so that even if you offer a buyer a male for the same price as a female, he will prefer a female for that particular purpose.

In the last few years, female mink of all sorts have been sold out long before males. Paris, incidentally, has always been interested in females and small males, as they are suitable for very light garments. In the 1966–67 season, while ranched mink females in all colors continued to sell well compared with males, it was hard to sell the females of wild mink even at a quarter of the price of the males.

This latest development can be attributed to two causes: the large-sized males of good color have been selling at very high prices, chiefly to Italy; and makers of jackets anywhere in the world just are not using wild mink females – they prefer to use the much more easily matched ranched mink.

Fisher is a good example of a fur that does not follow the rule that the bigger a pelt is, the more money it is worth. The small, female fisher has been worth far more than the big XL and L males as far back as the records go. This is because the small pelts are lighter, they are much more silky and they are usually darker and bluer in color. The demand for females lasted as long as the fur was used, chiefly in Europe, for throws or chokers. Now that this particular type of fur piece is out of fashion and fisher is beginning to be used for jackets and capes, the

difference between the price of large and small pelts has lessened considerably. However, despite the few exceptions to the rule, it should be accepted that in most types of furs the bigger the pelt the more it is worth, other factors being equal.

Width, of course, must always be taken into consideration as well as length when judging sizes. If a pelt is stretched out long to make it appear bigger, it must be discounted accordingly. A long, narrow fox, lynx, r ıskrat, beaver or anything else does not look big to the practised eye. It looks *wrong* and may be discounted even more than the actual loss in area would justify.

Conversely, the mistake is made of overstretching the width of some sections of pelts. This is particularly common with muskrat and squirrel from certain areas.

A pelt that is too wide in proportion to its length never looks as big as it actually is, particularly if it is in a bundle of other pelts that have been stretched normally.

Incidentally, overstretching in any direction tends to spread the hairs of a fur over a wider area so that they are farther apart. This makes the fur appear, and feel, thin.

Color

It is hard to believe, but for 4,000 years, long before Cleopatra even, red was the most fashionable color for furs. The hides of female deer, or does, being reddish, were worth far more than those of bucks in Europe. For centuries white furs and others of light color were dyed red to suit the fashion. Of course, in those days a fur was often used *inside* a garment as a lining, and showed a contrasting color when the garment was opened.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, darker furs became more fashionable, with sable, skunk, dyed fur seal and other such furs being most in demand. In furs such as marten or fisher, the dark pelts were worth tremendous prices, and it was the blue-black furred pelts of wild mink that became the most prized. Black fox with few silver hairs brought fantastic prices.

When people started raising mink on ranches, they bred for color and were eventually able to produce mink that were, on the average, far darker than most wild mink, thereby adding greatly to their value. This is still more or less true. Any suggestion of reddishness in a fur has long been sufficient to downgrade it right away. Even when furs are to be dyed, reddish skins are not wanted, since it is claimed that these will not take a black dye as well as a clear-colored fur will.

When furs are to be dyed a light color, such as eggshell or oyster for beaver, or other light shades for white fox or other furs, it is vitally important that the furs be clear-colored and not yellowish or reddish to start with, even if they are to be bleached before dyeing.

For many years now dark bluish beaver pelts have been in demand for use in their natural color. Pelts that have reddish flanks (usually in the spring) and that

are to be dyed light colors are discounted by the buyers by 30 percent or more. So also are pelts in which the top of the underfur shows a reddish tinge.

Therefore, till such a time as red becomes fashionable again, clearness and darkness of color means greater value, other things being equal. Once a wild mink has faded or gone even a little brown or reddish (which can happen late in December) it has lost half to three quarters of its value, even if the fur is still of top quality and straight-haired.

Mink ranchers have recently developed a new color in mink that is said to be rosy in hue, but it is likely that this will turn out to be just a passing promotional fancy. However, nothing is impossible in the fur business. Years ago a lady asked me to select a pair of foxes for her and I picked out the finest white, blue, red, cross and silver foxes obtainable, only to be told that however magnificent they were, they were not quite what she was looking for. Catching sight of a bundle of old off-color, brownish-reddish silver foxes of practically no value, which she happened to see hanging in a corner, she said, *"That's* what I want, that's *exactly* what I want." So you never can tell!

Amount of Fur

By amount of fur I mean, basically, the length and density of the hairs. All true fur has two different types of hairs, or fur fibers. First, the top, or guard, hair that covers the underfur and protects it from sun and moisture; and second, the shorter, plushy underfur that keeps the animal warm.

The top hair is sometimes plucked, or removed, as in beaver, fur seal and most otter, as well as in muskrat used to make Hudson seal.

The underfur is never removed but is sometimes sheared, or cut shorter, after the top hair has been plucked. Having all the underfur exactly the same length gives a plushy, velvety effect and an absolutely flat surface, with a smooth, even appearance all over.

In most animals the length of underfur and top hair varies and in some places, especially towards the head, it is shorter. In a plucked pelt, this has to be equalized to improve the appearance and to avoid ugly "steps."

The underfur is denser in some pelts than in others, and this is a very important factor indeed in grading. If a mink pelt is lacking in density of underfur, there will not be enough support for the top hair and the fur will appear flat and lifeless, compared with a pelt that has dense underfur. Furthermore, if the fur is thin, there will be a tendency for the sewing seams to show through, which would spoil the appearance of the finished garment. Weak or thin fur never feels the same to the touch as that of good heavy quality, since the skin can be felt through the fur instead of there being a cushion effect.

In a beaver, the underfur is of primary importance. The top hairs are going to be removed anyhow. What remains after this must be a good solid dense body of fur, like a thick carpet, so that in touching it one is in no way conscious of the

skin underneath, but only of the fur covering it. Good fur springs back together very quickly if displaced or blown into, and it is dense enough to cover up the seams.

Only a very small percentage of muskrat pelts are of good enough quality to make into Hudson seal, as few have the required density of underfur. Such heavily furred pelts only occur in some parts of the continent where the feed is good and plentiful.

In long-haired furs, such as fox and wolf, thick, luxurious top hair is the most desirable feature. Providing there is an adequate amount of underfur, which there usually is in a prime pelt, this is good enough. The top hair should be as silky as possible without being fragile or brittle. It must be strong enough to take a bleach and a dye if it is not going to be used natural but coarseness, such as in some wolves, is undesirable.

The relative length of top hair compared with underfur is not too important in the long-haired furs, since these are used mainly for collars and sometimes for cuffs. However, when manufacturers start using such furs as fox and wolf for jackets again, as no doubt they will, presumably a smooth, even, medium-length fur will be preferred to something that is too long and shaggy-looking for a garment.

In mink, a short-haired fur, a pelt with the underfur about two thirds the length of the top hair is generally considered the best. If the top hair is longer than this, there is a tendency for it to look spiky, and also for the hairs to droop a little in disarray, so that the effect of smooth sleekness is lost.

Some mink, such as the extra large males, tend to have rather heavy long fur, even though top hair and underfur are in the right proportion. Such pelts are generally used in stoles or similar garments, since they do not have the sleekness that is so desirable in a jacket or a coat.

In general, then, a pelt that has smooth, dense fur will grade higher than one that has not.

Completeness of Fur

Since, as already stated, the chief beauty in any long-haired fur is its luxuriant growth, if this is rubbed off or damaged in any way that reduces complete coverage, the value of the pelt drops considerably. If damage to the fur is localized, it may be possible to cut it out, but this will entail labor, which is very expensive, and will reduce the area of the skin. In addition, cutting away part of the skin may make the pelt lopsided, if the damage is only on one side, and may also give the fur an uneven appearance even after it is dyed. Obviously, the buyer will want to pay less and the pelt must be downgraded, even though, as often seems to be the case, it is a top quality pelt otherwise.

Furs of all kinds (except beaver and muskrat, which I will deal with later) are at their best in the early winter. New fur replaces the short summer hair in the fall, growing to its full length and completely covering the animal by late November or

early December. Later on there is a tendency for some of the fur to wear off, especially the top hair in long-haired animals. An animal may rub this top hair off on bushes or trees or against the sides or top of a burrow or, in the case of a beaver or muskrat, the entrance to its house. Sometimes when a fox sits or lies on the snow or on a rock, some of the top hairs become stuck and pull out when the animal gets up.

The later in the season it gets, the looser both the top hair and the underfur become in their attachment to the skin and the more likely they are to come out. They also become more brittle and prone to break off. The rumps, shoulders and sides are the parts of an animal most likely to show this "rubbing."

In addition to this, lynx and coyote, especially, tend to become "springy"– very flat and almost bare – on the shoulders and head. In many cases, the remainder of the pelt is complete and not rubbed at all. People often wonder why such a pelt is discounted so heavily by buyers. The fact is, of course, that even though the damaged area is not all bare, the hairs around the bare spots tend to be loose. By the time a pelt comes back from the dressers there may be only two thirds or, at best, three quarters of it that is usable. Unless the pelt is a really large one, there will not be enough area left to fill the pattern for a collar. Also, the gradually shorter fur of the shoulders and head will not be available, and this part of the fur is needed in a collar. Usually a pelt is split lengthwise in two, the butt ends are joined together at the back and the shorter fur comes to the front, where it moulds itself well to the contours of the top part of the coat. Obviously, most buyers prefer to pay more for the good complete pelts, which suit their purpose so much better.

Often, people have asked why a beaver with part of its top hair missing should be discounted and put into a lower grade. After all, everyone knows that the top hairs are going to be plucked out anyway; and often this rubbing is only around the rear paw holes, in a rather unimportant part of the pelt.

Well, buyers are affected very much, either consciously or subconsciously, by the first flash appearance of a pelt. When they see a rubbed beaver, it automatically registers as a lower grade pelt. Such rubbing occurs much more frequently in a later "springy" pelt, and points to the likelihood of other defects. Buyers surmise that the rest of the fur is probably weak or loose and the pelt is to be avoided except at a low price. Inclusion of such a pelt in a lot where the other pelts are uniformly complete would be a great error as the whole lot would be discounted out of all proportion.

Actually, where the top hairs of a beaver are missing in a localized place, if you look carefully you will often find that the underfur is a little chopped off also. This might be evened up in the shearing process, but meanwhile the pelt must be discounted.

In beaver, as in some long-haired furs, there is a decided tendency for the fur to be incomplete or rubbed between the shoulders more than anywhere else, and often in pelts that are otherwise in excellent condition.

If a muskrat, beaver or, sometimes, a mink is drowned in a trap, the fur is sometimes all plastered down and appears very thin. Unless these pelts are combed out and cleaned, they must be heavily discounted as buyers will judge them for apparent lack of quality and will also be afraid of tainting (page 18).

Straightness of Top Hair

Straightness of top hair is most important in mink and otter. It is true that fox or lynx, and especially a silky fisher or marten, may become "singed" accidently by fire or other heat. It may also acquire a "kinky" or "turned over" appearance through too much stroking or handling or dragging over a table. But it is in mink, particularly, that the greatest loss in value occurs. A singed mink is worth only half or a third as much as a straight-haired pelt, even if the latter is not of top winter color.

As mentioned earlier, the fur on most animals is at its best in the early winter. After this, there is a tendency for the top hairs to dry out and lose their life, first at the tips of the hairs and then lower down. Once this happens, the fur is very subject to singeing from friction, contact with snow or rocks, or other causes.

Singeing is usually first noticeable on the tail. The top hair of a mink gets curly at the ends first and then it becomes higgledy-piggledy and unruly.

Mink in some parts of the country are especially vulnerable to singeing and, curiously enough, this applies mostly to the two extremes in texture. The fine silky, short-napped and rather small western Ontario mink become almost worthless early in the year. So do the very large coarse-haired North Dakotas and, to a lesser extent, the very large Western Arctics.

Presumably because of feed, but perhaps also because of different housing, comparatively few ranch-raised mink are singed even when pelted after they have mated late in March, by which time most wild mink are very badly affected.

Singed otters have always been discounted heavily, which may seem strange since they are going to be plucked anyhow. However, almost invariably such pelts also have faded, off-color, brown underfur, which would drop the value down considerably even without the singed top hair.

In the old days some otter (straight-haired, of necessity) were used for collars for men's cloth coats. Some were also used for otter caps but usually only the cheaper pelts were used for these. More recently, practically all otter pelts have been used plucked – for ladies' coats. Otter coats are popular in Europe and Eastern Canada. Within the last year or so, there has been some demand for otter pelts with the top hair still on. These, of course, should be straight-haired.

Damage to Fur

Although damage to top hair and underfur has already been dealt with under the heading of "Completeness of Fur," there are a few other things that should be mentioned.

Sometimes a pelt such as a marten is found to have patches of fur chewed off right down to the skin. Presumably, this happens after the animal is trapped and a field mouse or other animal ends up with an expensive and comfortable nest. To make it worse, this usually happens to the finest pelts and it makes them almost valueless.

Some years ago, many lynx, especially the smaller, younger ones, had two spots on the rumps about the size of quarters, where there was no top hair left. I was told that irritation by a parasite caused the lynx to chew and scratch away the fur. Although damage like this has not been seen for some years. I mention it in case it turns up again sometime. Such damage knocks quite a bit off the value of a pelt as it is in an important place.

One very common form of fur damage is tainting. It is caused by carcasses being left too long before skinning or by their being left piled up together so that the body heat cannot escape. Even if carcasses are piled in the open in the cold, the damage is done before they are frozen completely. If a carcass is left in a warm room for even a few hours, the fur will probably taint, and the same thing is true of "green" (fresh) pelts not stretched out to dry.

What happens is that the dampness and the warmth, whether artificial or from an animal's body, favor the growth of bacteria, which rot the roots of the hairs. The roots are in follicles or, as it were, holes in the skin, out of which the hairs grow. Once the roots rot, there is no longer anything to hold the hairs in tight and whole clumps of fur will come loose at the slightest pull. This is disastrous, as no buyer will give more than a few cents for such a pelt. It is true that sometimes the damage is localized, and part of the fur may dress up perfectly well. More than likely, however, there will be no fur left anywhere – so who wants to gamble?

Tainting is not common in long-haired furs, even though they are usually dried fur out and the skin does not have much contact with the drying air. Occasionally, the tails of foxes taint unless they have been properly split, boned and dried out.

Tainting occurs more often in beaver and muskrat than in mink. This is probably because these two are usually taken in the spring when higher temperatures outdoors increase the possibility of pelts becoming spoiled, whereas mink are taken in colder weather.

In muskrat you can usually smell the taint before you pick up the pelt, even though the skin may be quite dry. Weasel and squirrel pelts (which are nearly always, and should always be handled fur in, skin out) are often tainted, sometimes badly, though perhaps only in one spot.

Squirrels often have small bare spots around the butt of the pelt. They usually show as "windows," or small shiny spots, on the skin. If you put your finger inside the pelt against these spots, you can see the different color of your finger through the semitransparent skin. The cause of these windows has not been definitely established – they may be due to tainting or, possibly, some form of mange.

Weasel is usually tested for tainting by putting a couple of fingers inside the pelt at the suspected area and withdrawing them while still pressing downward. If the fur is not tight, a few hairs will be found on the tips of the fingers, which means that the pelt will shed fur when dressed.

For some reason, there is a very common tendency to leave two little pads of fat on the hip part of weasel pelts. Sometimes these pads dry out, but more often, if not scraped off, they result in tainting this very important part of the pelt.

Damage to Skin

There are many types of skin damage, and the degree to which a pelt must be downgraded varies with the kind of fur in question. For instance, in a long-haired fur that is going to be used natural and not dyed or blended, the color pattern is extremely important. Any damage that leaves a hole or gap in the pattern ruins the pelt for this purpose, so that it can only be cut up for trimmings.

Even if a pelt is to be dyed, damage may break the "flow" of the fur and spoil it. In most pelts, the fur is longer in the center of the back and shades off gradually and regularly to the sides or flanks; also, towards the head, where it becomes quite short, and to a lesser extent, and more gradually, towards the butt. Any step or break in the top line of this fur will be rather obvious and will spoil the appearance of the pelt. Such defects may be covered up by splitting the pelt into strips and resewing them together, but this is so expensive that it is usually cheaper to buy a more expensive but undamaged pelt. Skin damage may be caused in a fight or in an accident of some kind before an animal is caught, or by trapping or shooting.

In some years the skin of wild mink males, although quite seasonable, may be covered with black marks caused by bites received in fighting. The fur is liable to come away in such spots, leaving small bare patches after dressing.

The skin of a beaver often shows what appear to be scars, probably dating from the previous spring or even before. Buyers definitely downgrade such pelts.

Both beaver and muskrat tend to fight in the spring mating period and are often badly damaged as a result. Some, especially muskrat, have great gashes in the skin that can make pelts almost worthless.

An animal that is snared often has a brown line right across the pelt. This is particularly common in squirrel and it also occurs fairly often in beaver. If an animal is left too long in a snare, the part of the skin under the snare becomes damaged and the fur will pull out.

Some traps leave similar marks on pelts. Occasionally, a line is found on a fur-out pelt such as lynx; the fur in that area appears matted. This sort of damage puts a buyer off even if the fur does not seem to be loose.

Much of the damage to the skin of an animal is caused by shooting. Though one small clean bullet hole is not usually serious, the large number of holes caused by a shot gun are very damaging. If a shot gun has been used at too close a range,

the skin often looks as though the animal was killed by a hand grenade or a high explosive shell.

Generally speaking, the extent to which a pelt must be downgraded because of damage depends on the location of the damage and the amount of labor that will be required to repair the skin after dressing. It should always be taken into account that small holes tend to become large holes during dressing and even a series of very small holes, as caused by shot gun pellets, tend to join and end up as a series of long slits or gashes.

The location of damage is important. For instance, a small shot hole in the head of a squirrel or muskrat is of comparatively little importance, whereas one in the middle of the back is bad.

The size of a damaged area is something else that must be considered carefully. The usual method of "damaging out," or repairing, a pelt is to extend a roundish hole lengthwise, by making a triangular cut at each end, and then sewing the two edges of this slit together. When the pelt is wetted down and restretched, the required area will lie flat and not be too noticeable. However, the total area of fur is reduced and the pelt is less valuable. Furthermore, this work costs money for labor, which is a big factor. For example, you cannot sell a slightly damaged or damaged beaver to buyers from New York at any price, simply because labor is so expensive there that the cost of repairs would be prohibitive. In Montreal, on the other hand, these beaver are bought and used quite freely, if the price is right.

Nearly all Canadian squirrel pelts go to London, England. Since labor is reasonable there, pelts with only one small hole in the body are worth only about 15 percent less than undamaged ones, the difference covering the cost of repairs.

Damaged and badly damaged muskrat always end up in Europe where it is possible to get labor cheaply enough to sew pieces together to make up "plates" or oblongs of pelts sewn together. Subsequently, these are made into garments elsewhere without too much additional labor.

Another type of damage that should be mentioned is caused by scraping the skin too closely. This most frequently happens on pelts that have a thick skin, such as beaver, bear or hair seal, which require a lot of scraping to prepare them properly. An overscraped patch appears as a darker spot on the skin. The roots of the hairs, especially the top hairs, have been exposed and cut. If a finger is passed over the skin side at such a spot, the rough ends of the hair roots can easily be felt where they are exposed. These hairs will come away at the slightest pull, almost as in tainting, but overscraping is more likely to affect the top hairs than the underfur. Naturally, damage of this sort, although it may be localized, equals that of a hole of the same dimensions as the piece that has to be cut out.

It is interesting to note that in the very early days of fur trading in Canada, beaver skins were deliberately overscraped all over so that the top hairs could all be pulled out, leaving the underfur. Then several pelts were sewn together and worn fur-in by the natives. After some months of wear during which the skin absorbed

the body grease of the wearer, the leather became semi-tanned and as soft as chamois. It was the fur from these pelts that was most highly prized by the hat-making industry. However, the market of today is quite different from that of two hundred and fifty years ago!

Two more types of skin damage remain to be discussed, "burnt" and "wetted."

A burnt skin is one that has lost its natural oil, probably as a result of being dried too rapidly. It is stiff, at any rate in the affected area, and if it is bent over, it will crack along the fold and break with an audible snap!

Burnt, or grease-burnt, skins often occur in beaver and muskrat and, occasionally, in otter and mink. These aquatic animals have a heavy layer of fat immediately below their skin and unless this fat is properly removed the skin may be burnt. The condition is seldom found in land animals, whose skins are usually lighter and not as greasy, but occasionally it turns up in squirrel, coyote, weasel or bear.

Although the burnt area may appear to be limited, the whole skin will usually disintegrate when wetted down, as the effect is general even if the symptoms are not. Such pelts are worthless, except for the fur that can be salvaged from large-sized beaver pelts. Sometimes hatters pay a very small price for these pelts and cut the underfur off and mix it with rabbit fur to make hats.

Finally, there are "wetted" skins. If a pelt is taken off the stretcher before it is dry, it usually wrinkles and the appearance is ruined. Since some parts are damper than others, the skin usually shrinks unevenly.

Wetted skins are most common in beaver and muskrat. Buyers assume that such pelts will turn out to be burnt or tainted and will not dress. So, no matter how good the quality, size or color, these pelts must be graded very low and will sell for very little indeed.

Loss in size also automatically lowers the value of beaver. If taken off the stretcher while damp, the whole pelt shrinks, especially where the wrinkles form, and it can easily drop down a size in consequence.

All in all, damage cuts down the value of pelts considerably and a buyer often discounts them even more than is justified. Naturally, he is prejudiced against damaged pelts and if they are offered with undamaged ones he will cut his price on the whole lot. He does not have time to check every single pelt carefully and when he sees a poor one he feels that others in the lot may also be damaged, even though not obviously so. Rather than take a chance, he tends to exaggerate the effect of the damage and to assume that it will get worse when the pelt is dressed.

Seasonableness

To an educated eye the appearance and color of the skin, or leather, side of a fur pelt denotes the time of year an animal was caught and is an almost infallible indication of how good the fur will be.

The skin of most fur-bearing animals is white during the summer months.

This condition is known as summer prime. At this stage an animal's coat is "fuzzy" wool rather than fur and is of no value whatever. Early in the fall the skin turns dark (even black) and then it gradually becomes prime, or seasonable. It turns white again in the late fall or early winter. As primeness increases, the fur grows out and becomes longer and denser. Since the two processes occur at the same time, one is an indication of the other; in other words, a prime skin is fully furred and an unprime skin is not fully furred.

Muskrat and beaver are exceptions to the general rule. Their skin usually remains bluish throughout the winter and does not become prime till nearly spring. Also, their fur is at its best and thickest in the late winter while the skin is still slightly blue.

The last noticeable part of a fox or coyote to show primeness is a triangle at the root of the tail. Early, or unprime, long-haired pelts usually have short fur in the center of the back, and in very early pelts the fur all over is short and of low quality.

In mink, the growth of winter fur and improvement in color shows first in the tail. However, the last parts of the skin to become prime are the root of the tail, the nape of the neck and the paws.

By the end of November or early in December, mink fur has attained its darkest and bluest color and the skin has become creamy white. Soon after the skin is prime, the color of fur starts to dull and then fades to brown, or eventually reddish brown.

In squirrel, the skin of the back is usually all white and prime, with full fur, while the belly skin is still blue. These bluebellies are worth about 25 percent less than seasonable pelts. When they are dressed, the bellies are found to be low in quality and, since whole pelts are needed for most garments, this is a serious detriment.

The last stage before full seasonableness in squirrel is a slight blueness on the the skin around the paws. These pelts sell for about 10 percent less than fully prime ones.

In weasel, both the fur and the skin change color. The fur becomes brown and flat in the summer and is worth very little indeed. It changes back again towards winter, and sometimes a few dark-brown hairs are left, even when the skin is white, prime and fully furred. These pelts are called "greybacks" and, though often the fur is going to be dyed, they usually sell for about a third less than fully white pelts.

A mink's skin gets brownish and reddish towards the spring, as does that of an otter, and there are often dark marks between the shoulders. These are sure signs that the fur is past its prime and that it will be weak and flat, especially on the shoulders.

Signs of springiness – areas where the fur is flat and almost bare – also show on the skin side of marten, fox and wolf pelts taken late in the season. However,

since these pelts are always displayed with the fur side out, springiness is easily recognized.

As mentioned earlier, the skin of a muskrat or beaver primes up towards spring but shortly afterwards it gets lighter and drier, first between the shoulders and gradually all over. At the same time, the fur quality deteriorates.

A prime-skinned muskrat almost never has dense enough fur all over for it to be used for making Hudson Seal. As soon as there is open water muskrats start to fight and their fur gets damaged. Quite apart from this they develop dark patches halfway down on the sides of the back, indicating springiness. These patches are known as "yokes," or "saddles," and the pelts as "lates," or "shedders." When the pelts are dressed, the underfur may still be fairly good, but the top hair in these two dark areas usually comes out. Naturally this is a very serious defect.

Beaver pelts also get damaged in the spring when the animals fight. In addition they develop springiness like those of muskrat. The first sign of this springiness is a darkening – or speckly, blackish appearance – of two areas, more or less as in muskrat but larger. This indicates that the underfur, as well as the top hair, is loose and less dense than in a fully seasonable skin. During combing, after dressing and plucking, mounds of the loose underfur from such pelts accumulate beside the fur worker. As a result, the finished fur is much weaker and thinner than it should be and it makes up into a much poorer garment.

Muskrat trapped at its prime

Many handlers will not buy these "springy" beaver at any price, and those who do are only prepared to do so at drastic reductions in price. On the other hand, some country dealers and fur buyers not properly aware of this characteristic in late beaver have lost money on their purchases late in the season.

The other defects of late or "springy" pelts, such as rubbing, singeing, loss of color and so on, have already been dealt with. However, it must be emphasized that late pelts usually show signs of these defects, and buyers will examine them carefully to arrive at a safe evaluation. As a general rule, a late pelt is worth at least a third to a half less than a seasonable one.

Buyer inspecting fox pelts at an auction

Appearance

Why do furs that are well handled, clean-skinned and clean-furred invariably bring more than those that are not? Presumably, for the same reason that commodities sold in the supermarket and elsewhere sell to better advantage if attractively packaged, or even if just wrapped in cellophane.

It is a question of appearance. A buyer may know that a greasy-furred pelt will dress up much better than appears possible at first; and a muddy-furred pelt will improve even more, providing it is not tainted. Nevertheless, his opinion is greatly influenced by original appearance.

The dense fur of a clean, good quality pelt inevitably attracts a buyer, and a true fur man derives genuine pleasure from handling a well-furred, attractive pelt. In the same way, a well-finished skin – smooth and free from excess fat or inner skin – will be much more attractive. Also, there will be far less risk of it becoming grease-burnt or tainted and not dressing well.

Even if a buyer is going to dress a fur himself, he cannot help being affected. If he is buying for someone else as a broker, or, in the expectation of selling to someone else at a profit, as a dealer, he will be keenly aware of the impression the fur will make on his customer.

While care must be taken not to overgrade a pelt on account of good handling, one that is not well handled should definitely be downgraded. This should also be done with pelts that are not stretched in the normal shape for a particular section of the country. Buyers shun such pelts and are apt to conclude that they have come from other area where the pelts are inferior and less valuable. They are wary of anything that smacks of "mixed sections" since texture, length of fur and quality vary considerably between different areas.

GRADES

The actual title that anyone may wish to give a certain grade of fur is of comparatively little importance. However, where two people want to exchange ideas on furs it is obviously important that, for instance, *A* should know what *B* means when he talks about "Ones and Twos," and *B* should know what *A* means when he talks about "Slightly Shot."

If a fur broker receives an order to buy at an auction, by cable, long distance phone or other means, he must know exactly what his customer expects to get in the way of grade, size and color for the given price.

In the old days, and even today, some pelts were described as "Firsts," "No. 1's," or "Seasoned," but this description was only applied to absolutely perfect pelts, which represented a very small percentage of a whole parcel, probably only 2 or 3 percent of some varieties.

In recent years, it has usually been found more convenient to broaden the top grade so that it represents from a quarter to a third of a good seasonable parcel of pelts. This grade is generally referred to either as "Ones part Twos" (written as I pt II) or, alternatively, "First and Best Seconds" (I and Best II). It includes the perfect pelts and the almost-perfect ones, which are still very good pelts suitable for use in the most exclusive trade.

In London, Best Seconds used to be put up separately, without the Firsts, and called "No. 2's." On this continent such a description is seldom used because it might be confused with the next grade down, which is usually called "Seconds" and is sometimes referred to as "Twos."

In an average seasonable parcel of pelts, there might be 50 percent Seconds, which in fox would perhaps be lower (flatter) or a little rubbed, and in beaver might be rather flat in the center or very slightly damaged. A Second in all furs is still a fairly average pelt with a fairly solid usable amount of fur.

Furs are often described as "Ones and Twos" (I & II), as opposed to "Ones part Twos." This is really not a correct description as such parcels seldon contain very many Ones but usually consist of II with a few Best II.

Seconds represent the bottom end of the quality range an average good manufacturer would be likely to use. Anything below this is generally referred to as a "Low-grade" and is handled by manufacturers who specialize in cheaper garments or trimmings.

Thirds (III) are badly rubbed or flat pelts in most kinds of fur and "Fourths" (IV) are extremely bad and of very little value. Damaged and badly damaged pelts are either put up separately or mixed in with the Thirds and Fourths. Also, in recent years, it has become customary at most auctions to take the slightly damaged beaver pelts out of the Seconds and sell them separately. This is because they sell better to some markets than to others, as explained earlier.

Occasionally, a "Fifth" grade is referred to. This title is used to describe a cub or kitt – extra small and with very little fur.

Some kinds of fur may be graded "Poor Seconds," "Low Seconds" or "Inferior Seconds." These pelts are the poorest of the Seconds but are still better than Thirds. If there are enough of them, for example in beaver, they may be put up separately.

The above general grade titles and descriptions do not apply to all kinds of fur but are the basis of grading most of them. Grades of individual furs are discussed fully in the pages that follow.

LONG-HAIRED FURS

Fox (Colored)

The most common fox is the red fox. After being out of favor for some 20 years, when it was hardly worth trapping, red fox is back in good demand. It is being used mostly dyed black, for collars for cloth coats. It would certainly seem worthwhile to encourage trappers to go after red foxes wherever they are plentiful. Prices have been averaging $7 or $8, with best pelts bringing $10 or $11 or even more. In 1965–66, demand from Japan forced these prices up to practically double but they have leveled off again.

Incidentally, even though foxes had not been trapped to any extent for years, there did not seem to be much fox population anywhere on the North American continent till the last few years. About three or four years ago they started to increase at a fantastic rate in North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

They seem to be gradually spreading through Southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and perhaps will be plentiful again in all areas, including the North, before too long.

I mentioned earlier that size was important in foxes. The size of adults in any given area seems to be quite uniform, but sizes in different districts vary considerably and this affects prices. However, in any one area a *comparatively* undersized pelt is usually that of a younger fox, whose fur is flatter and of poorer quality than that of an adult, and the pelt will find its way into the lower grades automatically.

To be on the safe side, a smaller pelt of passable quality should be downgraded by at least one grade. If there are enough of them at an auction, they will probably be put up on their own so as not to spoil the price of the other pelts. Such lots of smaller pelts almost invariably being considerably less money.

The size of a pelt can be judged by the eye. However, in western fox anything under about 32 inches from the root of the tail to the nose is considered Medium or Small – unless it has been stretched exceptionally wide. The following sizes apply to western (and better eastern) fox:

Extra Large (XL) – over 35 inches
Large (L) – 32 to 35 inches
Medium (M) – 29 to 31 inches
Small (S) – 28 inches or less

The following seven grades of quality are now being used where quantities permit: Firsts, Best Seconds, Seconds, Thirds, Fourths, Damaged and Badly Damaged. At eastern auctions where large assortments of many species are available, except for the Firsts and the Best Seconds which are combined, these grades are usually sold separately. Where quantitites of the various grades are not sufficient to produce satisfactory lots, however, two or more grades of similar value are often offered for sale together.

There are usually very few Firsts. It is easy to be misled into thinking that a good pelt must be a First because it looks so much better than the usual quality of foxes handled. It is only if a grader had 400 or 500 foxes in front of him at the same time, that he might be able to pick out the dozen or so pelts that would qualify as Firsts.

Incidentally, to digress for a moment, the ideal way for anyone to learn to grade furs is to be given the rules and explanations first and then be given 400 to 500 pelts to grade. If after this an expert goes through each grade, pointing out any mistakes and the reason why a particular pelt should have been placed in some other grade, a very good foundation has been established. After further practice with this or other parcels of the same variety of pelts, a newcomer will really begin to get the "feel" of fur grading.

Unfortunately, it just is not physically possibie to have large parcels of 15 or 20 different kinds of fur available to most people. However, no opportunity to examine furs in quantity should be missed. Anyone who lives in, or occasionally

visits, a city where there is a fur auction company should try to visit it in order to examine the furs. The best time to do this is two or three days before an auction when the furs are "on show." By then they have been graded into lots so that buyers can check and evaluate them before bidding at the auction.

When teaching students how to grade parcels of furs, it used to be the practice to make up a sample lot of about 500 pelts consisting of, for example, 25 I's, 200 Best II's, 200 II's, 50 III's, 20 IV's and 5 Damaged. This is a possible assortment but it should by no means be considered typical, as different parcels in different areas at different times of year vary enormously. Students would be asked to grade the parcel, then instructors would check the errors, mix up the pelts again and let the students regrade the parcel.

Next day, an instructor would extract the 25 I's, leaving the parcel at 475, or perhaps put in 25 extra II's or III's to make it up to 500 again. Sometimes he would also subtract 25 or 30 of the II's and substitute III's. This, of course, all without the students' knowledge.

Invariably, students would grade some pelts as I's and sometimes even make 20 or 25 pelts of this grade. Still more strikingly, if the 25 I's and all the Best II's were removed, they always made quite a few Best II's by moving the best of the regular II's, not necessarily even borderline pelts, up a grade. This was a most convincing lesson, and after it students always remembered that a firm idea of grade must be fixed in one's mind, and this must not be influenced by how the parcel is running.

If you were to examine a Best II red fox you would find it to be a very attractive pelt with a good heavy coat of fur all over.

The way to examine a pelt is to put it on the table, take a quick glance at the belly to make sure that there is no damage or bare spot there, and then, holding it belly down with your left hand near the rump and your right hand holding the head, give it a couple of shakes by moving your right wrist. This shakes the fur up so that it can be seen more fully and also loosens any hairs that may have got out of place or that were clinging together. As you do this, you have to let your eyes travel all over the fur.

What do you look for? – to see how complete the top hair is. It is helpful in the red fox, especially, that the underfur is a different color from the top hair. If the top hair is lacking or sparce in places, it is possible to see the underfur. On the other hand, if the top hair is complete, the underfur does not show anywhere.

During this examination, you should stroke the whole of the back lightly downwards towards the tail, then shake it up and stroke again. If you keep your fingers together, slightly bent but not too stiff, you can judge the denseness of the fur with the sides of the fingers and the edge of your palm. The tips of the fingers are not used much when examining long-haired furs but are used on short-haired ones such as beaver.

As you stroke the fur, you should get an impression of a cushiony effect that keeps you from being aware of the skin underneath the fur; that is, unless you are handling an early flattish pelt. Furthermore, as your hand moves along, the displaced fur should spring up again immediately, showing that it is supported by a dense underfur. On a well-furred fox, the fur should flow over the tops of your fingers when it is stroked in the other direction – towards the head.

Examining a fur this way gives one a very good, general impression of the pelt. It reveals whether the fur is complete or whether the top hair is rubbed, especially on the flanks, shoulders or rump. If the top hair is weak, rather than actually missing, it is most apparent on the shoulders, where there seems to be enough space between the hairs – cracks, as it were – to see right down to the skin. This is most noticeable in an overstretched pelt. Since the thinnest part of the skin (other than on the belly) is on the neck and shoulders, it is here that the pelt is most likely to stretch out if it is pulled too much while still wet. A pelt that is weak on the shoulders or sides also may have a yellowish appearance because the underfur is showing through the sparse top hair.

Although all this takes a long time to describe, an experienced grader will do the whole thing in a few seconds. After one glance, he will be nearly always make up his mind right away as to the correct grade. He can easily examine several hundred foxes in an hour.

During the inspection of a pelt it is important to look carefully for any irregularity in the pattern of the fur, any break in the surface or any "step," as it were, where there is a *sudden* drop or rise in the depth of the fur. All such defects must be carefully examined. This is done by parting the fur with the fingertips, or

by blowing into it, and carefully checking for any bare spot, raised seam where the skin has been sewn, hole in the skin, chipping or nibbling of the fur, and so on. Sometimes there are little telltale tufts of underfur that are loose or out of place and these may denote tainting or, perhaps, shotgun damage to the skin. It is possible to locate seams and some other defects by glancing up the inside of the pelt, or by inserting the hand and forearm and examining the inside with the fingers. Shot holes often have irregular sides and the surrounding fur is matted with blood, which helps in detecting them.

So far, we have been considering a Best II pelt, which has some very slight weaknesses. A No. 1 pelt, on the other hand, is just about perfect, with hardly a hair out of place, and lots of heavy, luxuriant fur. The underfur does not show through anywhere but is completely covered by the top hair.

In a Second (II) grade pelt, you can expect to find a certain amount of top hair missing here and there, where the underfur shows through. This is quite noticeable in some areas, such as the rumps, flanks and shoulders. The pelt is still quite usable and, if you can imagine it dyed black or some other color, you would likely consider it well furred enough to make up into a fairly good quality collar. In a II, you should be able to see quite clearly how the underfur shows up more because of its different color.

Next, there is the pelt that is also a II but lower, or flatter, than usual. It is not necessarily rubbed but has much less underfur, especially in the middle of the back, where this can be felt with the fingers. You can feel the skin underneath the fur to some extent. The skin, incidentally, is likely to be bluish, denoting that it was taken before it was fully prime. Nevertheless, the fact that the top hair is fairly complete is an advantage. It will make a smooth collar, though less bushy than one from a higher-grade pelt, and it is not spiky, as a badly rubbed pelt might appear.

Actually, it is possible for a lower, earlier type of pelt to be good enough to grade as a Best II. However, such pelts must always feel as though they have plenty of "body" in the center. They do not occur very often in most areas and, to avoid confusion, it is probably better to grade any pelts with lower (but not flat) centers as Seconds.

Where there are enough of lower-type II, they are usually sold separately in complete lots and sell better for being separated from the longer-furred or "heavier" type, as both are good for their own purposes. One of the first rules for putting up furs to the best advantage is to avoid contrasts. If flatter pelts are mixed with the heavier ones, the lot is not uniform and is therefore less desirable to buyers.

If there are comparatively few of the lower-type pelts, they have to be put in with the heavier types and downgraded accordingly. There is a tendency to be stricter and to put most of them in the regular II and only a few of the very best in with the heavier Best II.

The drop in quality from regular II to Thirds is marked and unmistakable. Some pelts are badly rubbed, which is obvious from the contrasting colors. The top

hairs that are left are spiky and give an irregular surface to the fur, and the pelt looks shaggy, with depressions or hollows in the surface where the rubbing is localized.

Then, again, there is the flat Third, quite immature and with very little underfur, especially in the center of the back. It is usable only for a very low-grade article. The skin is probably quite blue; and top hair is lacking in the center, so that the different-colored underfur shows quite noticeably.

As far as a IV is concerned; it can be a really flat pelt without much fur and mostly skin; or it can be badly damaged; or it may be fairly complete as to underfur but with either no top hair at all or only isolated patches of top hair here and there. Such pelts are sometimes referred to as "Samsons" (no hair).

Incidentally, quite a few years ago I tried to get some people interested in buying these woolly fox pelts, particularly silver fox, and shearing the underfur after dressing and plucking, but I was not very successful in this.

As far as Damaged pelts, the lowest grade, are concerned, if there are enough of these, it is usual to sell the best ones separately as "Slightly Damaged" and to keep the poorer ones separate or put them in with the III's or IV's.

It is inadvisable to grade any pelt that is noticeably damaged in any of the top three grades (I, Best II, II). However, it would seem that good-quality damaged pelts, which may consist mostly of Best II quality with some good II, should bring at least as much as the regular II. This, of course, will depend on the extent of damage permitted in the lot.

As a rough guide, any hole larger than a twenty-five cent piece will throw the pelt into the damaged lot, particularly if it is in an important place on the back and if the fur around it is matted. Minor damage on the belly can be disregarded but anything obvious puts the pelt into the damaged category.

Well, so much for red foxes. I have gone thoroughly into the grading of these, since the grades for most of the other long-haired furs are basically the same; once a person is thoroughly familiar with red fox, the others are comparatively easy.

The other colored foxes – cross fox, silver fox and bastard fox – are all color phases of the red fox and can occur all in the same litter. The grading for quality is identical, but color is of some importance also. In red fox, a pale fox, if it is strongly furred and if the top hair will take bleaching and dyeing safely, is just as valuable as a darker one unless it is to be used natural – as is sometimes the case now, especially in Japan. However, to most fur men who remember the old days, the darker red fox always seems to be better and silkier, perhaps because the top hairs show up to better advantage.

There is still a demand for a small quantity of the really heavy, dark-red fox found in Western Alaska (Kotzebue), Eastern Siberia (Kamchatka and Yakutski) and far Eastern Canada (Nova Scotia and the interior of Labrador). A few similar pelts also come from the Yukon and MacKenzie River areas.

In cross foxes, for many years, the darkest pelts verging on silver were worth a great deal more than the other colors and were in fact described in London as "Fine Cross." Later on, when silver foxes were raised in quantity on ranches, this type became much less highly prized.

Then, the United States protected the price of silver foxes with a very heavy duty and this type of dark cross fox became wanted again, since they would still be imported into the United States duty free. In many cases, they were as dark as silver fox and only differed from them by being a little "stoney" on the shoulders, or tinged or yellowish on the back, or by having slightly yellowish ears. "Stoney" meant that the underfur was a little lighter than on the rest of the pelt or lighter than was common in the regular silver fox.

From the very dark pelts, cross fox varies all the way down through "medium color" to "pale," which in many cases resembles just a red fox with a slight covering of black hairs across the shoulders and down the center of the back. This cross pattern is common to all cross fox and is the origin of the name. The medium color can be extremely attractive with a good pattern of black hairs on the general color of yellowish red. These pelts were very much in demand when fox jackets were fashionable. The ones with fur of medium depth were the most sought after, as they made up into smoother, less-shaggy garments.

It is interesting to hear how this too-heavy effect was overcome in the deepest-furred pelts in those days. The manufacturer cut the whole pelt into lengthwise strips from head to rump and then sewed them together again with a strip of tape, maybe half an inch wide, between each two strips (leaving a 1/4-inch gap after seams). These gaps were completely covered up by the fur and, since they thinned out the density of the fur, made the jacket appear less bulky. This is a slight exception to the general rule that the greatest possible density of underfur and top hair is most desirable. However, it was only the most densely furred pelts that a manufacturer could use this way to get, as it were, two pelts out of one! When fox jackets dropped completely out of fashion and the number of colored foxes used for collars declined greatly, the value of cross foxes became very low.

Finally, Scandinavian ranched blue fox began to gain in popularity and then dyed red fox. Some of this demand was reflected onto cross fox but an extraordinary situation developed where the former king of the crosses, the really dark pelts, and the previously valuable mediums, were worth less than the pale-reddish pelts, which had always been the lowest in value. These "pales" were found to be the next best to red fox in taking the dye.

Now, after many years, silver fox pelts have jumped suddenly in value as they are very much in demand in Japan and, as might be expected, the medium and dark types of cross fox have risen in value again! All this certainly shows to what extent fashion controls the value of furs.

At one time. wild silver foxes were worth their weight in gold. However, once ranchers started to raise them in quantity in captivity, the value of the wild pelts dropped drastically. They were much inferior in color, being generally stoney and rather dark, not silvery. Quality also was generally poor by comparison.

Still, it was hard to convince trappers that silver foxes were worth so much less than before. For years, many traders had to pay trappers $25 or more for pelts they knew would not sell for more than $7 or $8 at the most.

So, even if you hear that silver fox has gone up to $35 or $40 or $50 again, do not forget that this will be for the good quality silvery ranch pelts and the wild ones will probably still only be worth $5 to $10 on the same market! One more point on color: When silver fox was at its peak, the pale silvery pelts were most desired in the United States; but in Europe and Australia it was the dark pelts, with as few silvery hairs as possible, that remained the most popular for many years. Eventually, this changed and the paler silvery types were in demand everywhere.

Lastly, there is the so-called "bastard fox," which can come out of the same litter as the others but is best described as a pale cross fox with a red streak, instead of black, down the center of the back. If a pelt does not have a black center, it is not a cross fox, though some of the darker bastards were used for jackets in the old days. Such pelts should be included with red fox.

The blue fox, though technically a colored fox, has no relationship at all with the red, cross and silver foxes. It is actually a color phase of the white fox, and occurs occasionally in white fox litters in the Arctic.

In Greenland, the Danish government was able to establish the blue as the predominant color by killing off the white and leaving the blues over a period of years. Nowadays large quantities of blue foxes are raised on ranches in Scandinavia, and also in Poland. They have been quite popular, the Scandinavian average price varying between $10 and $25 from time to time.

The few Arctic blue foxes produced in Canada are silkier but smaller than the Scandinavian ones. They get brown and off color very early in the season and are hard to sell for more than $5 or $10.

White Fox

White fox has had many ups and downs, the quantities taken annually being subject to rather severe fluctuations, though working to a fairly regular four-year cycle.

The use of white fox undyed, like that of white mink, is quite limited. White furs do not lend themselves to daytime wear and are used mostly for evening wraps to wear to the opera or theatre in cities such as New York, London and Paris. Nevertheless, it is still important for white fox pelts to be white. There is a great tendency for them to be yellowish, and this is considered a fault, since most of them nowadays are dyed in light colors and yellowed pelts do not take the dye so well.

The greasy yellowish staining is caused partly by careless handling in skinning but often it is acquired by an animal while it is still alive, perhaps when feasting on a dead seal or whale. Anything that can be done to remove this grease before it gets further into the fur and oxidizes will pay big price dividends.

In grading, the chief concerns are quality and color. It is harder to detect any lack of top hair in a white fox than in others because the underfur is usually the same color as the top hair. However, by holding the pelt up to the light, and draped over your left forearm so that you can look at a cross section of the top of the fur on the back against the light, you should be able to see if the top hair is all there – in the center as well as on the sides.

Apart from color, the selection of I and Best II pelts from a parcel of white fox depends on length or heaviness of top hair and density of underfur. Usually the latter is very dense in white fox, but sometimes a pelt has an open, weaker underfur that drops the grade right away.

An experienced grader gets to be able to *feel* whether a pelt is well covered with top hair or whether it is the underfur that his sensitive fingers are feeling. The top hair definitely has a smooth, silky finish over which the fingers slide without friction, whereas the underfur feels woollier and less sleek and tends to slightly resist the movement of the fingers.

There used to be a grade called "I No. 1," also known as "Fine Whites," for absolutely complete heavy-quality pelts in which the underfur blew white all the way down to the skin. This type was perfect for use in ties or neckpieces, but represented a microscopic proportion of the total number of pelts. Nowadays, the few best pelts are still often kept out and sold separately as I's but, as in the case of colored foxes, it is best to forget about this grade and consider I and Best II (or I pt II) the highest grade.

A Best II is a good, solid, well-furred pelt but some of the top hair may be missing. A II is still a usable pelt, with not more than one of the following weaknesses: slightly rubbed areas, slight weakness in the underfur, slightly low areas or very slightly blue underfur. If you shake the pelt and stroke it, as for red fox, you can feel the solid dense quality of the underfur in II's and Best II's.

At the same time one has to be on the lookout for any irregularities in the surface of the fur, as these may be a sign of a sewed seam, or a hole, in the fur. These are a little hard to detect in white fox, as a dense underfur closes up well over any blemish. In the case of a small clean hole that has been very carefully sewn up by some skillful lady, the pelt can still be graded Best II or II if it is of sufficiently good quality.

Thirds may contain some open-furred pelts and also some definitely rubbed ones. However, usually many of the III's are discernible right away because they are bluish in color. They are the pelts of animals on which the fur did not have time to attain its full winter whiteness. Such pelts are often smaller than the rest, denoting immature animals.

The fur is shorter in III's than in II's, and there is generally an absence of top hair. The skin, however, may appear quite prime, since stageiness does not seem to occur in most white foxes.

A Fourth (IV) is a still-earlier pelt, bluer-furred and very flat. This grade may

also include some whiter pelts that have no top hair and look as if they had been clipped all over with shears.

Damaged pelts of poor quality and badly damaged pelts may also be included in this grade. As in red fox, the good quality damaged or slightly damaged pelts are usually put up on their own, separately.

In white fox a thorough examination of the belly, as well as the back, should be carried out and this is usually done first.

All the belly is used, so it must be well furred and free of damage. Incidentally, if the belly is well furred and well covered, the back will almost certainly be the same.

White fox

I have already mentioned that the color, or degree of stain, of a white fox is important. Very few pelts are perfectly white, with no trace of yellow on the belly or back. However, a large number are "slightly stained," or slightly yellow, and these can be bleached out enough to take a light-colored dye. If a pelt is slightly stained on the belly, though perhaps not on the back, it should still be included with the slightly stained.

A pelt that is definitely yellowish is described as "stained" even if only part of it is affected. Such a pelt has to be dyed a darker shade or undergo strong bleaching before dyeing. Bleaching may cause the fur to deteriorate, become brittle or slightly singed, and affect the wearing qualities. Also, the effect of the bleach

may wear off, in which case the yellowness will reappear and make the dyed color unattractive.

Lastly, pelts may be very badly stained, with the fur matted together with oil or grease. These will have to undergo a severe cleaning process before being dyed and will never amount to much. They must be graded well down in the III's or IV's, or, better still, put up in a lot by themselves.

For any given grade, the following comparative values indicate the approximate discounts that should be made for staining on white foxes:

	percent
Clean	100
Slightly stained	80 (20% off)
Stained	60 (40% off)
Badly stained	40 (60% off)

Size is important in white fox and it seems to vary considerably even within areas. A lot depends on what time of year the run is most plentiful. Occasionally, there have been quite large shipments from places such as Nueltin Lake on the west side of Hudson's Bay, in which almost every single pelt was blueish-furred and smaller than normal. The best were only Seconds, and not very good Seconds at that, with the balance Thirds and Fourths.

The reason for this, of course, was that they were taken too early. The local trappers were well aware of this, but foxes were plentiful in the fall and early winter and the trappers were afraid they would move away out of reach if they did not catch them then.

Some years most of the foxes in one area will be X-Large or Large; or sometimes even the adult foxes seem to be smaller than usual, probably because feed has been less plentiful than usual. In addition, as a general rule, foxes in the Eastern Arctic do not seem to run quite as large as those in the West.

It is usually considered best to offer white foxes in average sizes. The poorer quality of most of the really small pelts puts them in the lower grades anyhow. However, some smaller pelts are quite well furred and, though it is usually preferable to grade them as Seconds, there may be too many to do this and some may have to be left as I's and Best II's. Nevertheless, a careful watch must be kept on the sizes, and if the general run is not at least between 24 inches and 28 inches from root of tail to nose, the parcel should be discounted. If a preponderance of small pelts makes it necessary to put them up separately, they will bring a considerably lower price but, of course, the other lots will be improved accordingly.

Lynx

Many of the rules and methods of grading foxes can be applied to lynx. However, there are a number of features that are rather different.

In the grading of lynx, the belly is very important. The fur here must be long and heavy, and must be clear colored, not brownish or reddish. There used to be an

axiom among fur graders concerning lynx: "Watch the belly and the back will take care of itself."

I would not go so far as that. In my opinion, the back must also be completely and carefully examined. Nevertheless, even more than in white fox, the belly is a tremendously accurate indication of the probable quality and color of the back.

So, if you are looking at a lynx pelt, first of all, give the belly a good examination and a quick stroking; then reverse the pelt so that the back is on top, and check this similarly to a fox pelt, while shaking it by the head. As you move your hand downward towards the tail, the fur has a definite flow to it; in a good pelt it springs back into place immediately and is deep enough to come right up to the top of the fingers or, in a really good pelt, to flow over them. The fur should be clear-colored and silvery.

Sometimes a pelt may be well furred but if you look at the sides and shoulders you may see the light-brown color of the underfur showing through. This means that the top hair is not absolutely complete, as it would have to be for No. I. Even though there are usually more I's in lynx than in fox, it is probably still a good idea to disregard this grade and to consider Best II the top grade.

If a lynx does not have good fur flow as described above, it is a II. The general appearance is still good but the fur feels weaker, and the skin seems lighter and more crackly as it is moved. In a Good II, the fur does not offer the resistance to the fingers that it does in a Best II – it is more "feathery" – and the underfur seems to show through more. The color is still bright and silvery.

"Poor II" pelts are put up separately as there are usually quite a few of them. In these, the fur seems quite weak and the skin can be felt and tends to be rather tissue-papery. Many of them also have a distinct weakness on the flanks. The pelts usually have good, clear-colored silvery backs.

I have described three of the most representative of the pelts in these three grades. Few, if any, other kinds of fur show such marked and obvious differences in the feel of the fur between the top grades as the lynx does.

Now there are also other types of pelts which are put into these three grades in lynx I and Best II, Good II and Poor II.

Any pelt having a rusty or brownish belly must be immediately relegated to the Seconds, regardless of how good the quality and color of the back. If the belly color is really bad, it might even have to be dropped down to Poor II. Furthermore, if the belly is badly rubbed, the pelt is automatically a Poor II, since this defect will almost certainly show up on the back also.

The color of lynx seems to vary quite a bit in different areas and it changes very noticeably with the seasons, especially on the back. Usually it is a dull brownish grey in the summer and fall and sometimes, even though the fur grows quite thick, the color seems to take a long time to brighten up. Some lynx are dyed black, but the beauty of the fur generally lies in the bright silveriness of the natural color.

Any pelt that is very dull, brown, or dark must be downgraded. It would never go in with I and Best II pelts and is quite unlikely to be graded Good II. Probably it would end up as Poor II or even III.

The really early type of lynx are quite dull grey and, even though well covered have a woolly kind of fur that feels greasy or dirty to the touch (as opposed to silky). These pelts are always III's or, if very flat, IV's. As a general rule, all I and Best II must be clear-colored in back and belly; all Good II clear in back and nearly all in belly. Poor II may contain a fair proportion of off colors.

As in all long-haired furs, rubbing of top hair is an important factor in lynx. The fur is quite silky and delicate and subject to this rubbing. A pelt that is rubbed on the sides or shoulders should be graded Poor II, or, if it is not too bad, maybe Good II. The degree to which the underfur shows through is a guide to this.

Lynx

A badly rubbed pelt has to be graded III, unless it is bad enough to be IV. The smaller the pelt, the softer the fur, and the more subject it is to rubbing, especially on the flanks.

As the season advances, lynx begin to show strong evidence of "springiness." The skin in the area of the neck and shoulders becomes quite stiff and boardy and, at the same time, the fur rubs off in this area. In bad cases there is little left except a little underfur.

Often, the remainder of the pelt may remain quite well furred and of good solid quality and fairly good color. However, as explained earlier, quite a wide area

around the bare spots has to be discarded, reducing considerably the total amount of fur available.

Therefore, such pelts must be downgraded drastically; they cannot be graded any higher than Good II, and in many cases would only rate as Poor II or III. Where possible, springy pelts should be lotted on their own to avoid spoiling the uniformity of other lots. Very careful attention must always be paid to the shoulders of lynx, especially in any animals caught after the first part of the season. Fully seasonable pelts from certain parts of the Northwest sometimes have boardy necks and must be downgraded to Good II, even though their fur is perfect, as buyers consider this a defect.

The relative importance of damage in a lynx pelt is about the same as in red fox. However, more lynx than fox show signs of having been snared either by the shoulders or at the hips – the fur appears displaced or matted along a line across the pelt – and these areas must be carefully checked. Pelts with bad snare marks usually have to be classed as Damaged or perhaps even Badly Damaged.

As far as size is concerned, at some auctions "mediums" are put up separately. These pelts are between 32 and 36 inches from root of tail to nose. Anything under 32 inches is considered small.

In Western Canada, there have been so few undersized pelts in recent years that I am afraid the young lynx have either not been born or that they have not been surviving. In parcels of western lynx, usually only the pelts that are obviously undersized are kept out and sold separately. This would include pelts running around 32–33 inches and under, unless they are stretched exceptionally wide.

The younger lynx are almost always a very nice pale color and are in strong demand in Switzerland and elsewhere. Their medium-length fur and extra-pale color makes them very suitable for jackets and other garments for skiing, and they often bring a much higher price than their size would appear to justify.

Prairie Wolf

Grades for prairie wolf are very close to those for red fox and somewhat simpler than those for lynx. Rubbing may not be quite so obvious as in a red fox, since there is less contrast in color between the top fur and underfur; however, there should be no trouble in detecting this, especially on the shoulders, flanks, and rumps.

Again, I and Best II is the top grade. These pelts are pretty complete all over and, in a typical seasonable parcel, might represent perhaps a quarter or a third of the whole.

Then, as usual, II grade pelts are still reasonably well furred – not top quality but not too badly rubbed. This grade may also include some very slightly damaged pelts of otherwise good quality. All in all, a II has to be presentable enough to make up into a decent collar. Probably a third to a half of the pelts in an average parcel of prairie wolf are Seconds.

Earlier, less-mature pelts, which are usually a little weak and low in the center of the back, may also be included in the II grade. If there are enough of them, however, it is preferable to put these pelts up separately and call them "Low Seconds." They will run smaller than the regular II's as they are less mature and may be slightly blue-skinned. They must not be actually flat and you should not be able to feel the skin through the fur, even in the center.

The III grade, as usual, takes care of the definitely rubbed pelts as well as those that are definitely flat and early (and usually blue-skinned).

Fourths (IV) are the really flat and very badly rubbed pelts. Cubs of small size and little fur are of no value.

Good pelts that are damaged are usually sold separately but bring rather less than II's. Badly damaged pelts and poorer-quality, slightly damaged ones usually end up in grades III and IV. Some prairie wolf pelts are taken off the boards too soon and become tainted. You can usually spot these by their unpleasant smell.

Burnt skins are occasionally found in wolf and must be watched for as they, too, are completely worthless. Fortunately, this type of skin usually shows up in the handling and shaking when it may start to fall to pieces.

Prairie wolf pelts under 35 or 36 inches – root of tail to nose – should be considered small and downgraded one grade or, if there are enough, sold in a separate lot. They are worth much less than the larger pelts.

Like the lynx, the prairie wolf is very subject to springiness. In some years this appears very early – even in December and January – probably as a result of sickness. Springy skins must be watched for carefully. When examining a pelt, your eye is attracted mainly to the body part of the fur but be sure to always look at the neck, also, especially in wolf and lynx. Springy-headed wolf are usually sold separately but they must be graded down to at least a II and, if really bad, a III.

It is not customary to grade any prairie wolf pelts as I's. However, a small proportion of pelts received are exceptionally silky all over, even down the mane and grotzen, or center of the back, where the fur is always the coarsest. These pelts are usually pale and, being almost as soft as those of fox, are in great demand for top-quality collars in the light shades. Since such pelts occur only in certain areas, and then only in small quantities, it is best to simply include them with I and Best II pelts. They will be picked out at auctions and sold to the best advantage of the shipper.

The paleness mentioned above must not be confused with the chalky white color of the manes on some wolves. White manes are almost invariably a sign of exceptionally coarse fur. Pelts with very coarse fur must be graded one grade lower than finer pelts of equal size. They are usually sold separately and, though often very large and heavily furred, they bring no more than the price of the lower grade. There is no mistaking this coarseness. The fur feels harsh and bristly to the touch – almost like a coconut-fiber doormat. Obviously, such pelts are unsuitable for a lady to wear around her neck as a fur collar.

One more thing about prairie wolves: There is not much variation in the color, except for the select pale pelts referred to above. However, a few pelts have an exceptionally tawny, brownish "doggy" color. These are heavily discounted by the trade, as it is not possible to dye them into light shades. Often they are coarse, also, and must be graded right down, in the same way as other coarse pelts mentioned earlier.

Timber Wolf

Timber wolf pelts are used mainly for floor rugs or wall decorations in hunting lodges, in summer camps and sometimes in home rumpus rooms; and for trimmings parkas in the North, particularly in Alaska. As you undoubtedly know, there is less tendency for ice and frost from the breath to accummulate on this fur than on others.

If the pelts are to be used for rugs, it is extremely important that the nose and face are intact and that all four feet, complete with claws, are left on. Absence of any of these cuts down the value greatly, as the sportsmen-buyers want their rugs complete with mounted head, feet and claws. For parkas, of course, the accent is on softness and color.

There are several varieties of timber wolf. First, there is the fine Arctic, Barren Lands or Caribou wolf. The pelts are not necessarily very large but they are exceptionally soft and silky, and usually of a very clear, light-grey color. Generally they are smooth, without too much mane, and are never coarse, even in the center.

This Arctic wolf is beautiful and always brings tremendous prices, although it has been becoming increasingly rare in recent years. The regular type of timber wolf is a lot coarser than either the Arctic wolf or the prairie wolf and it is usually very large. It varies in color from almost completely white, down through various shades of grey and greyish black to a dark blue.

Timber wolves usually have a pronounced mane of long fur. The pelts tend to be weak on the shoulders and there seem to be fewer good-quality pelts in the dark colors than in the light grey. On the other hand, a chalky, almost white timber wolf is nearly always coarser than others. Usually, the light grey colors are the most popular and bring the highest prices because of both color and quality.

The unforgivable sin in a timber wolf is tawniness. Very brown or reddish pelts bring comparatively little money, and there is always the suspicion that one of their ancestors may have been a sleigh dog. Actually, I have seen dog pelts sent in as timber wolf from time to time but there should be no mistaking these. Apart from color, a dog's fur is shorter and fairly even all over; also, it feels soapy and there is no underfur.

So few timber wolves are available that every pelt, or small group of similar pelts put together in a lot in an auction, has to be judged and evaluated individually, rather than in large lots.

As already explained, color and texture are of very great importance in timber wolf but, at the same time, the usual signs of quality must be looked for – good heavy fur and the absence of rubbing or flatness. As far as damage is concerned, the large area involved reduces the importance of a fairly small clean hole, especially in pelts for rugs, providing the pattern of the fur is not affected. Some tainted pelts may be found, and a careful watch should also be kept for overscraping of the skin, which exposes the hair roots and loosens the top hair.

Timber wolf pelts are stretched either fully open or cased (uncut) with the fur out. One should beware of any pelt that is cased with the fur in, as this may be some wily trapper's attempt to hide the fact that the pelt has flat springy shoulders. When a grader examines such a pelt he inserts his forearm and thoroughly explores the shoulder area with his fingers until he is satisfied that all is in order.

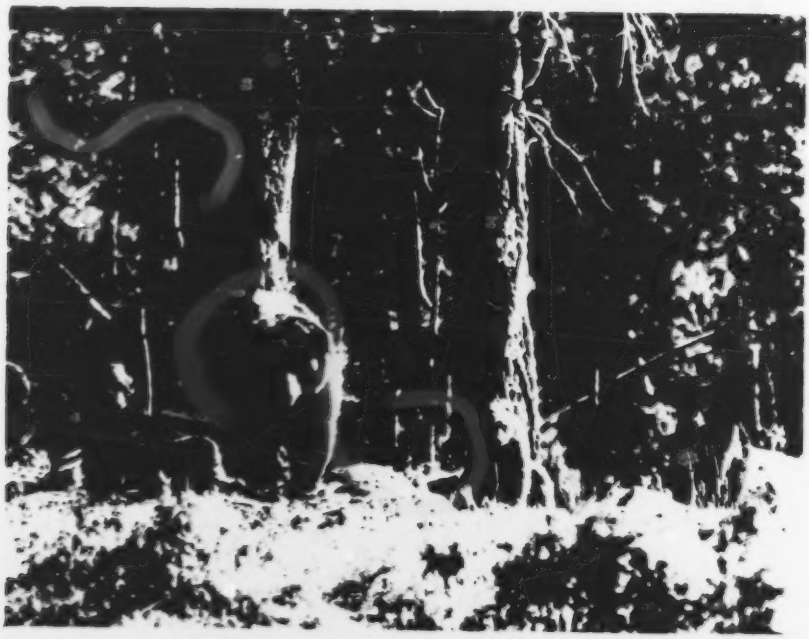
Timber wolf

As a matter of interest, there is one more type of wolf besides the prairie wolf and the timber wolf, but it has comparatively little value. It is called the brush wolf and is most commonly found in Ontario and eastern Manitoba and in the east central United States. The brush wolf is in between the other two in size and is covered with even fur, about 1 1/2 to 2 inches long, all over. The very coarse top fur is blackish, but sometimes partly silvery, and the underfur tends to be somewhat yellow.

Bear

Since bears are used for more or less the same purposes as some timber wolves, it may be as well to deal quickly with them at this point. The black bear is much the most common throughout Canada, although a few brown, honey and cinnamon bears – different color phases of the blacks – are found in the same areas. The grizzly, another species of a silvery brown color, is found mostly in the Rocky Mountains. It should not be considered as anything to fool around with, as it hasn't a very sunny disposition.

The glacier bear and the Kodiak bear in Alaska are the biggest of all the colored types. They are similar to the grizzly in appearance but belong to a different species and are probably descended from Siberian bears that migrated to Alaska many centuries ago. The polar bear is an entirely different species again and is found only on the Arctic shores and sea ice.



A family of bears

There has been a steady demand for white bears right along, although it is only in the last few years that high prices have been paid for them ($150 to $300 for the better pelts). There also used to be buyers for the grizzlies and Kodiaks, but it is only in the last few years that any interest has been shown in black and brown bears. Today you cannot get enough to satisfy the demand for good quality pelts, which sell at from $25 to $35 each, or more.

Years ago, when bear pelts reached the market in thousands, the bigger ones were made into carriage robes or, to a lesser extent, rugs. Sometimes cub fur was used for collars as a substitute for skunk, which it resembles. Today, practically all bear pelts are used for rugs and wall hangings, except for those used to make "busbies," or bearskin hats, for the Guard regiments in Canada and Britain. Therefore, as in the case of timber wolves, but even more definitely so, the face, nose and lips of bear pelts must be complete and all four paws intact, including claws, if a full price is to be obtained.

Pelts should be heavily furred and not rubbed, as badly rubbed or flat pelts are worth practically nothing. Some bears are reasonably well furred on the back but the fur is weak on the lower flanks; when such pelts are stretched out flat they appear to have only a narrow strip of good fur down the center. These pelts must be discounted considerably,

If a bear is blue-skinned, or if the skin is too closely scraped, the pelt will likely be a shedder and the top hairs will tend to come out, making the pelt worthless. It is necessary, also, to watch carefully for burnt and tainted pelts and for any that have not been properly dried, since these may deteriorate later.

A best-quality bear pelt has a smooth, even appearance, with the fur practically the same length all over the back. Ideally, the fur should be 3 or 4 inches long, but a bear with smooth even fur, even if it is a bit shorter than this, is preferable to one with long, uneven, shaggy fur.

If you bend a bearskin and the fur separates in an even wall with a clean break, it is almost always a smooth, good-quality pelt. On the other hand, if you do this and the fur does not break cleanly but appears woolly and twisted and intermingled, you will probably find that the whole pelt is of poorer quality or is shaggy.

Small bullet holes are to be expected in bears and may have to be ignored. However, any large hole or damage that obviously spoils the appearance of a pelt will necessitate downgrading it.

Brown bears usually bring at least $10 more, quality for quality, than black, as they are much rarer and therefore more to be desired. Grizzlies of course, are higher in value than either.

King of the bears, however, is undoubtedly the polar bear. There are never enough of these. The fur is usually smooth and not very long, no matter what size the bear. This is probably because he spends much of his time in the water where long shaggy fur would be undesirable. Sometimes, it is possible to feel the skin through the fur, which is likely not as dense and cushiony as we would like; however, a pelt like this will still bring a good price, although naturally less than more-solid pelts. No polar bear could be described as silky – they are all more or or less coarse – but the fur should be solid and dense.

In addition to fur quality and size, which are extremely important, color has a very great effect on the value of a white bear pelt. It is rare to find one that is

really white all over; most of them have to be bleached to some extent. Yet it is important that they should be as little "creamy" as possible so that the minimum of chemical treatment has to be given. If a pelt is actually yellow, it will never be possible to get it really white and it must be downgraded accordingly. Furthermore, as in white fox, a polar bear pelt that is a little yellow, but of uniform color all over, is worth more than one that is mostly white with dark-yellow or orangy patches. Everything possible should be done to keep grease and oil off the fur and to remove, as quickly and completely as possible, any that may get on it during the process of skinning.

Polar bear fur is used on the British Columbia coast for "bucktail" flies for fishing Cohoe salmon. Belly fur is useful for this purpose, as the longer the hair the better. A skin has to be pretty badly damaged for its fur to be cheap enough for making bucktails, however.

Left, red fox pelt; right, wolverine pelt

Wolverine

Someone once told me that he had seen a lady with a collar of wolverine fur, and occasionally I have heard of a wolverine pelt being used for a rug. However,

probably 99 percent of the pelts end up as trimming for parkas, as wolverine is generally accepted as the best frost-shedding fur.

Like the fisher and the marten, the wolverine seems to be able to look after itself very well and seldom lacks food. This, combined with the fact that the fur is rather coarse but strong and long-wearing, means that most of the pelts are of good quality, except when taken out of season. Therefore, there is not too much to be said about grading, except that any pelt that is early, noticeably damaged or springy around the shoulders must be downgraded.

Wolverine pelts vary in color from brown to blackish tones, with lighter fur on the forehead and along the sides. In some areas the paler pelts with some whitish fur are preferred. In others, the preference is for brown pelts only slightly marked with lighter color.

Badger

Badgers occur only in the Prairie Provinces and in southern British Columbia . Although they live underground in burrows, their fur seems to be strong enough to avoid damage from rubbing. The chief difference between good badger and poor is in the density and quality of the fur.

Badger is usually handled flat. A large proportion of badger pelts are low to flat in the center of the back, whereas a top-quality pelt has quite dense, though

Badger

shorter, fur here. A good pelt also has quite long, thick fur down the sides of its back and a solid cushion of underfur to support this. Some pelts have fairly long-haired sides but the support is lacking, and the fur looks and feels thin.

Normally, a badger pelt is split down the center of the back and made into a collar or two collars. This perhaps makes the center of the back less important than in most furs. However, flatness in this area is still undesirable, since the amount of fur here is a good indication of the general quality and condition of the whole pelt.

The best way to grade a badger pelt is to examine the fur and to decide whether or not it is of sufficiently good quality to make up into a soft, fairly bushy collar for a cloth coat. Perhaps a third of a fair-sized, representative parcel of badger would fail to measure up to this standard. The rest would be graded Best II, with perhaps a very few fine, heavy pelts being I's. There is no mistaking these latter, if present.

Color is important and, even at the best of times, a pelt that is at all yellowish brings only about half the price of a pale silvery one. Incidentally, badger pelts from the United States tend to be yellower than the Canadian ones.

Badger fur offers an interesting exception to the law of supply and demand. Some 40 years ago badger was tremendously popular for collars. The supply was only moderate and prices were forced up till as much as $60 to $70 was being paid for fine pelts. As a result, quite quickly, intensive trapping and shooting drastically reduced the badger population and, thus, the number of pelts available.

Theoretically, the scarcity should have forced prices still higher, but actually the reverse occurred. Coat manufacturers, wary of a lack in continuity of the supply of collars, turned to other furs and did not include badger in their "line" (of samples). As a result, the badger market collapsed and only in the last few years has there been a little revival of interest.

Skunk

Skunk fur was tremendously popular for many years in Europe, where it was used extensively for fur collars and boas. A boa, or long scarf, consisted of a long. fairly narrow strip of fur, which a woman would wind once around her neck and let hang down at each end about as far as her waist. In those days, as many as five and a half million pelts, most of them from the United States, were offered in one year at the London auctions.

Today the supply of skunk pelts is almost nil, especially in Canada. There are just too many other occupations that are more appealing and more remunerative than skunk trapping. However, since the animal is found in most southern and central parts of the country, it deserves mention here.

When skunk was plentiful, grading consisted chiefly in taking out the obviously poor pelts and classifying them in the lower grades. This would include the pelts from small immature animals, as well as those that were really flat, obviously damaged, or burnt, of which there were quite a few. Practically everything else was

graded as I & II except for blue-skinned pelts, which would be designated as such or as Seconds.

Pelts taken late in the winter were noticeably brownish, as compared with the blue-black or fully seasonable pelts. They were discounted appreciably but were still graded as I & II, which normally covered perhaps 80 to 90 percent of the production.

Skunk pelts were also graded for size, which varied considerably between different areas of the country but not very much within an area. Smaller pelts were either downgraded or left as average sizes in the grade.

Another very important consideration in the grading of skunk was the amount of white in the stripe. The black fur was used natural, but the white had to be cut out and was used separately, usually after being dyed black.

Western Canadian skunks and most of those from North Dakota, are fairly uniformly striped with a long thin V of white. In some parts of Eastern Canada and the United States, the white stripe is very short or even nonexistent. In other areas of the United States, it may be very broad indeed, and sometimes the fur is all, or nearly all, white. The three color-grades used in the trade, to cover these variations, were usually "Longstripe," "Black and Shortstripe," and "Broad and White."

Raccoon

Raccoons are found in most parts of the United States but in Canada chiefly in the eastern provinces and in British Columbia. It is interesting to note that in the last few years a few hundred have been taken in southern Manitoba where previously they were practically unknown. Probably they were crowded out of Minnesota by overpopulation there.

The fur is low and even, and without much underfur, on most of the pelts from the United States, and on all from British Columbia. The better-colored pelts especially, used to be in strong demand for coats for men as much as, or more than, for women but nowadays most of them are made into collars for cloth coats. The raccoon in Eastern Canada and in the northeastern United States is almost a different animal, with heavy, very solid underfur. The Eastern pelts are plucked and sheared and made into attractive coats.

Since the two types are used for different purposes, it might be expected that the grading would be quite different for each. However, in raccoon, as in skunk, grading is more or less a question of sorting for size and of eliminating poor pelts from the general average bulk.

Shearing raccoon, that is, pelts that are to be sheared, must have a good dense underfur. Any that are not heavy enough for this purpose have to be sold at a lower price for use in collars. Probably these rejects still have deeper fur than the pelts from what used to be called "coat-coon" areas of the country, but the latter usually have a better, brighter color that makes them more desirable.

Raccoon

Practically all shearing raccoon tends to be a little yellowish and dull in color and this has to be accepted, but "coat" types should be downgraded if the color is not bright and clear.

Fisher

Despite its name, the fisher has nothing to do with fish but is a tree dweller and seldom comes into contact with water. The males are quite large and heavy skinned, with fur that is a little coarse and inclined to be "grizzly" in color. They have always been less valuable than the females, which are considerably smaller and have a soft skin, with silky fur.

As mentioned earlier, this once very valuable fur has dropped drastically in demand and value in recent years. The last markets to be interested in the small, fine, silky females – San Francisco and Paris – finally deserted them. The day of the fur tie, or "throw," seems over, for the time being anyhow, and new uses have had to be found for this fur. So far, fisher has been used with some success for capes and jackets and someday, perhaps, it will be used in stoles, as an alternative to mink.

The price gap between males and females has narrowed, since silkiness is not quite as important for capes and jackets as it was for neckpieces, and the larger size of males is to some extent an advantage. Color still seems to have some value, how-

ever. Previously, fisher was separated into Extra Dark, Dark, Medium, Pale and Light Pale, or Extra Pale, colors. Actually, in most cases, pelts of the smaller sizes and better colors were usually matched into twos, threes or fours, as they were worth a lot more this way. This is how they would eventually be made up and sold, and, if a buyer could purchase matched pelts, he did not have to waste a lot of time and effort trying to match them himself.

Nowadays, fisher pelts are sorted into two or three sizes and then into two qualities – good and ordinary, you might call them, but actually I and Best II, and II. Pelts of poor quality are rare, but any that are found are kept out, as are damaged ones. Poor-quality pelts usually are weak and unseasonable (early or late) and have an immature appearance – rubbing is quite uncommon in fisher.

Grade I and Best II Medium and Small pelts are usually sorted into these colors: Extra Dark and Dark, Dark Brown, Brown, Light Brown, Pale and Light Pale. Anything rusty or yellow is put up separately or classed with the poorer-quality pelts. The Extra Large and Large sizes are sorted similarly, by color.

Very large fisher tend to be "bucky" and heavy-skinned and, along with off-color pelts, automatically end up in the poorer-quality lots. In Eastern Canada, the quantities handled are quite large and a fuller assortment than above is sometimes made. However, in general, the grading is as described.

Marten

Marten is usually thought of as a long-haired fur, though it is shorter than most of the furs in this class.

As mentioned earlier, color used to be tremendously important, even though pelts with good color seldom were of fine quality. Today, most pelts are blended or dyed anyhow, so that the natural color matters very little.

Size is most important, not only because the largest pelts have more fur area but because, when seasonable, they are also the heaviest and densest. The largest pelts of all are found in the Western Arctic or Northern MacKenzie River District and, although they are a little more woolly and not quite so silky as in some other areas, they currently bring much the highest prices. Extra Large pelts in this area run from 23 to 25 inches long, whereas in other areas they are closer to 21 or 22 inches.

Marten pelts from the interior of the Labrador Peninsula are a little smaller and are extremely fine and silky, with very plentiful top hair – as in the best Russian sables. Their color is usually good, also.

Marten from the central area of the MacKenzie River Basin are not as big as those from the Western Arctic, nor quite as heavily furred, but they are usually a little silkier. Alaskan marten are in between these two in size and general appearance but are rather pale. Pelts from the interior of British Columbia run to darker colors but are quite a lot smaller, and those from near the coast are fair-sized but very woolly indeed. Pelts from central Ontario and Quebec are usually small and weak,

Marten

and yellow or orangy in color – strikingly different from those found only a few hundred miles to the north or northeast.

Next in importance to size, is quality. Marten pelts may be examined by shaking and checking, in the same way as fox pelts, but stroking should be avoided as much as possible since the top hair is silky and can be singed by too much handling.

In Europe, an examiner will judge marten by placing the pelt over the knuckles of his left hand, with the tail and rear paws firmly grasped, and the head hanging down towards him. Then the first and second fingers of his right hand, with the fur held between them, are run down from the butt towards the head in such a way that the flow of the fur can be both felt and seen and the depth of top hair and underfur noted. In this process, the thumb and first finger are on top and the thumb is used as an additional guide. This is a really good way to judge the fur accurately, especially around the shoulders where it is weakest. Some people are very much against this method, except perhaps occasionally in the shoulder area, since quite a bit of pressure is used on the fur and there may be some danger of singeing the top hair. Against this is the fact that it has been used for hundreds of years in London, as far as we know, without serious complaint.

As in fisher, there are very few low-grade, flat, poor martens (usually only unseasonable pelts) and these are taken out and put up separately as "Low-

grades" or III's and IV's. Blue-skinned pelts, which are not too common, are usually woolly, lacking in top hair and rather heavy-leathered.

The balance of marten pelts (other than damaged ones, which are dealt with below) are sorted into two grades accordingly to quality. December-January assortments should have a large proportion of grade I and Best II pelts, with any that are a little weaker, especially on the shoulders, going into grade II. Later in the season, the proportion of pelts with weak shoulders and thin fur is much higher and the pelts tend to be lighter. The skin is easier to feel through the fur and is generally more papery, although perhaps slightly stiffer around the neck. Thus, there are usually comparatively few I and Best II pelts, except in the first winter collections.

Incidentally, if marten is kept too long, the fur loses its sparkle quite noticeably, the skin becomes softer and both it and the fur seem rather lifeless. Pelts like this usually have been held over from a previous season and must be discounted.

Marten is more prone to damage than most other furs. Besides this, when marten was used natural, any break in the color pattern was very obvious. Even now that most pelts are blended or dyed, any damage or break in the continuity of the flow of fur seems more obvious in marten than in any other kind of pelt. A very few marten pelts are cut in strips for small trimmings, but the majority are used whole in jackets and capes and are needed intact.

There are definitely more damaged pelts, proportionately, in marten than in other furs and not only because grading is stricter. Quite a lot of pelts are received with some of the fur nibbled off, probably by a field mouse or some other animal while the martens were still in the trap. Sometimes this damage is quite extensive, but even a small bare area reduces the value of an otherwise good pelt to almost nothing.

Martens do not usually get rubbed, but may be shot or snared or damaged in any of the usual ways. In addition, some of them get pitch or resin from trees into their fur, which mats. With care, this can sometimes be removed but the fur is so fine that usually some of the top hair, and perhaps underfur, has to be removed as well. Therefore, such pelts must be discounted considerably, especially if the matting is extensive or if it occurs in several spots.

SHORT-HAIRED FURS

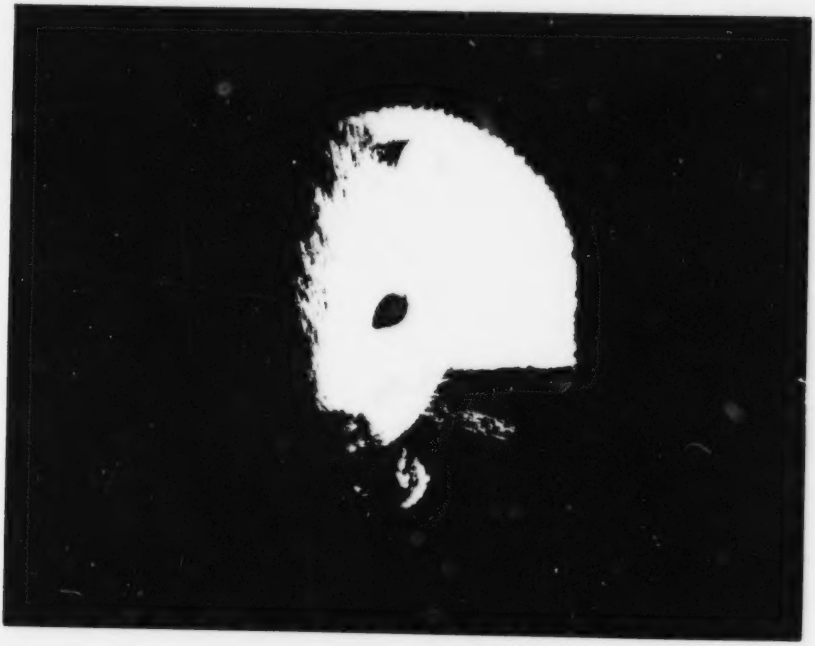
The term "short-haired" is applied to beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, weasel and squirrel. The first four of these are aquatic animals. Their short, dense underfur, with its natural oils, repels the water and probably keeps the animal much warmer than would be the case with a wet fox, coyote, or other long-haired animal. Presumably, this short fur also cuts down the resistance when the animals are swimming through the water and helps them to move faster.

Actually, a squirrel, and perhaps even a muskrat in some areas, has quite long fur in proportion to the size of his body. However, when a number of pelts

are sewn together into a garment, the fur is indeed short-haired in relation to the whole, and this is why it is referred to as such.

Weasel

There are two distinct types of weasel, or ermine (as they are also called): long-tailed, or prairie; and short-tailed, or bush. The former, commonly known as long-tails, used to be very plentiful in farming areas but disease and new methods of harvesting grain have reduced the population drastically.



Weasel

Straw stacks used to provide a good home and larder for field mice and other prey, ensuring long-tails of a plentiful supply of good fresh meat. When straw stacks more or less disappeared, things got tougher all around.

The long-tailed weasel does, in fact, have a very long, white tail tipped with black. The body fur, which is quite short and a little cottony, is pure white in the winter, unless dirty or stained. Incidentally, the absence of stains is very important, because a large proportion of long-tailed pelts are used in their natural white color, and not dyed.

In the summer, the fur is brown and by late fall it is usually white, but liberally sprinkled with dark-brown hairs and still low in quality. At this stage, the pelts are called "greybacks." By December, the fur becomes prime and white all over al-

though occasionally a pelt (called "slightly grey") still has a few dark hairs left. A pelt that is brown or grey also shows it on the tail, where the fur is less bushy. This makes it possible to spot such a pelt even before looking at the body fur. Neither greybacks nor slightly greys have much value, though the latter sometimes are dyed. Curiously enough, in the United States some brown pelts of good quality are found.

The fur of the short-tailed weasel is longer and denser than that of a long-tailed one, and it does not look cottony but has a good growth of both top hair and underfur. It is not nearly as white as a long-tail's but is rather creamy or, in some cases, yellow and therefore all short-tails are dyed. Buyers prefer evenly colored pelts, other things being equal, since they take the dye better than stained or varicolored pelts. Short-tails change color seasonally, in the same way as long-tails, but flat browns and greys are trapped much less often in this variety.

Quite a number of slightly grey short-tails of good quality are found. Although these will probably dye just as well, or almost as well, as the creamy-colored pelts, they usually sell for 25 or 30 percent less. They are sometimes a little difficult to spot, as they have only a few dark-brown hairs, but they still have to be classed as greybacks.

The grading of long-tail and short-tail pelts is basically the same. The pelts are handled skin out – except in Labrador and some parts of British Columbia – and if you see any that are not handled this way, they are probably damaged or unprime.

The appearance of the skin, therefore, is extremely important. It must be smooth and unwrinkled, free of blemishes, clean, and as white as possible. It is also desirable for the width and length to be in the correct proportion. Pelts that are stretched too long and narrow often look smaller, rather than bigger, than they actually are; and those stretched too wide may lose a size in grading because they are shorter than they should be.

Short-tails – Good northern short-tails are usually sorted into two sizes – XL and L – with three grades of each. The grades, similar to grades I, Best II and II for other furs, are called 1, 2 and 3 for short-tails.

Grade 1 pelts are absolutely prime, of excellent quality, and free of any blemish such as shot hole, bloodstain or discoloration. Grade 2 pelts, which are equivalent to Best II's, will probably dress up just about as well as I's but the general appearance is not quite so attractive to a buyer. There are still no serious blemishes but the skin may be slightly brown or red, or may have a small reddish area (a minor bloodstain) on the forepart. Number 3's, like regular II's, are good, whole pelts (except perhaps for a small shot hole near the head), but they have not been handled as well as they might have been. The skin is browner, or redder than in a 2 and there may be minor bloodstains on it and on the fur. The skin may be slightly irregular, that is to say, not absolutely smooth. A grade 3 ermine is still very usable. but the grade does include some weak pelts, especially late in the season. This weakness in quality is indicated by brownness or redness of the skin.

The relative values of these three grades in a sale where the offering is generally seasonable might be expressed as about 100, 80 and 60.

The first of the lower grades in the large sizes might be described as "Poor II and Slightly Damaged." This includes a few usable undersized pelts, but consists mainly of large, badly stained and badly handled pelts and those with small seams. These pelts usually look worse than they really are; however, they will require mending or cleaning up and the fur on some of them will be of poorer quality than anticipated by the time they are dressed. This grade might bring around 40 percent of the price of the three top grades, but when the demand for such pelts is poor the price is lower than usual in proportion to the others.

The next grade down consists of large and medium-sized badly damaged, unprime, poorly handled and slightly tainted pelts and everything else that's left except the junk. The small badly damaged, small tainted and large badly tainted pelts, kitts, and so on, go in the bottom lot and are hard to sell at any price.

Only two grades are made of the good medium-sized pelts; 1 and 2 together for the top grade, and 3 for the second grade. The same applies to good small pelts. Generally speaking, however, medium and small pelts are whiter-skinned than the larger sizes and, as a result, their grade 1 and 2 pelts together usually look pretty well as good – and as seasonable – as the XL or L grade 1 alone.

Providing it has been properly scraped, a firm thick skin almost always indicates a good quality dense fur in weasel of both types. Conversely, a light papery skin usually means thinner fur. An ordinary large short-tail (not XL) that is very light-skinned is usually put in with the medium-sized pelts.

Slightly grey short-tails are put up separately if enough are available but usually they are included in the Poor II and Slightly Damaged grade. Greybacks and browns are relegated to the next lot down, with the badly damaged, unprime and other poorer pelts. Good medium-sized pelts can scrape into these two grades also, but smalls have to be put into the very bottom lot.

When sizing weasel, an experienced grader does not work to a measure. Taking into account width as well as length, he judges by his eye as to whether a pelt is XL or L, medium, small or a kitt.

Pelts are larger, and the proportion of XL pelts is higher, in Alberta and the Northwest Territories than anywhere else in Canada. Sizing is stricter there than in, say, Manitoba and, as a result, the lots look very attractive and bring correspondingly high prices. As a rough guide, it might be said that a western pelt of normal width should measure at least 12 inches from root of tail to nose to rate XL or L, and 10 inches to be graded as medium. Anything under 9 inches should be considered a kitt, or "finger," rather than a small pelt, as it usually does not have much of a tail and almost no fur.

Since there is such a wide difference in price between the various sizes, it is important that a grader measures any pelt he is doubtful about. But remember, even if it should scrape through on actual measurement, it also must look right to go in any given size.

The handiest way to measure weasel pelts quickly is to draw lines (or cut grooves) 9, 10, 11 and 12 inches from the front edge of a worktable. If you place a pelt so that its back paws hang over the front of the table and adjust it so that the two indents on the skin on either side of the tail are level with the edge of the table, you can see at a glance how long the pelt is by noting where the tip of the nose is.

By measuring this way, the pelt is also in a good position for a grader to look at the fur, just by raising the tail up, so that the process of grading and sizing can be done in one movement, as it were. However, some graders prefer to examine the skin of a pelt from the head end, looking down, and to check the fur by bending the whole bottom end of the pelt backwards. To do this, all that is necessary in sizing is to put the left thumb at the root of the tail with the fingers on the other side of the tail, line up the end of the nose with the edge of the table and note which size line the root of the tail reaches. It should be emphasized again that, since the general sizes of pelts vary between areas, the sizing in some parts of the West may be more lenient than in others, and it is even less strict in the East.

Longtails – In recent years, there have not been enough western weasel to make extensive assortments. Three sizes are used: XXL, XL and Large. Pelts that are too small for the Large category usually find their way into the lower grades of the short-tails. Again, sizing is usually by eye but, as a rough guide, an XXL pelt should be at least 15 inches from root of tail to nose and an XL 13 inches.

Browns and greys are usually kept out and lotted separately, three sizes together, but sometimes they are put with the badly damaged pelts. All three sizes of pelts that are badly damaged, tainted, unprime and so on, are usually put together in one lot.

A parcel of good damaged pelts is usually made up, also. These pelts are of good quality and fair appearance but they have sewed seams, shot holes or other damage, or badly matted fur. They are not tainted, unless very slightly. As mentioned earlier, a pelt can be tested for loose hairs by inserting a couple of fingers inside it and withdrawing them, while pressing the pelt between thumb and fingers or against a table. If the fur is loose, there will be a few hairs on the tips of your fingers.

Now this leaves all of the better pelts. These are usually sorted into six lots – one for each of the three sizes of I and Best II pelts, and the same of grade II pelts. There are seldom enough long-tails to sort them into 1, 2 and 3 qualities, as for short-tails. As a matter of fact, quite often the XL and Large II's have to be put together, or even the three sizes of II's, but, it is best to keep the XXL separate as they sell to better advantage, with keener competition, that way.

The same applies to grade I and Best II pelts but it is important to keep the three sizes of these separate. Since prices have more than doubled in recent years, buyers are not very likely to grumble when they see small lots of good pelts.

Grade I and Best II pelts should be prime and well-furred, with smooth, white skin and only minor blemishes. Grade II's are still good but not quite good enough

for the best lot as they may have a very small shot hole, a slightly red or stained pelt or fur, a little rougher skin, or an all-over brownish appearance. Brownness, especially on the shoulders, usually denotes a later, springier pelt of poorer quality.

Some long-tails from dry areas of the Prairie Provinces are quite light-skinned and thin-furred, even when prime. These are not usually put in with pelts from other areas, even in the lower grades. If there are enough of them, a separate assortment is made.

I should not leave weasel without again mentioning that characteristic little pad of fat that is so often left on in the hip area on both sides – sometimes on the underpart as well as on the back. This is a frequent cause of tainting and the sooner it is scraped off the better. It is not the grader's job to clean up pelts but he does it in some cases, and certainly in this. It may mean the difference between a $5 pelt and a 20-cent one!

Squirrel

Grading of squirrel depends very largely on the appearance of the skin. This is not because the fur is not the most important thing but because, to the experienced eye, the skin indicates the grade and quality of the whole pelt, just as it does for weasel.

Needless to say, the fur is continually spot-checked, to confirm impressions given by the skin, to check on matting, etc., and to see how the general quality of a parcel of pelts is running. Quality varies considerably in different districts and at different times of the year within the same district.

Squirrel is not usually graded for size, but if pelts tend to be small, or, conversely, exceptionally large, they will be sold in separate lots if there are enough of them. Sometimes smaller pelts are kept out altogether and sold separately but more often they are simply downgraded.

The basic grades for squirrel are : I or "Clean"; Slightly Bluebellies; Bluebellies; Slightly Shot; II; Shot; III; and IV.

There is no mistaking a grade I pelt: it is prime, with a good firm skin that looks healthy as soon as you see it, and it feels a little oily, rather like candle tallow, although there is no fat left on it. The only damage allowed in a I is an occasional, very small shot hole in the head. If the hole is farther down, the pelt has to be graded "Slightly Shot." There must be no snare mark or any other discoloration on the pelt, although late in the season it may be necessary to ignore a little redness around the head (but *not* on the shoulders). The belly must be completely seasonable and white, even around the paws. A grader can afford to be quite strict in putting up this grade, as there is usually quite a large proportion of perfect pelts in a seasonable parcel.

Actually, the first thing that one should look at in a squirrel is the belly. This is the last part of the skin to prime up, or turn white. If it is still blue, after dressing, the fur in the belly area will be found to be shorter than it should be.

Any pelt found to be blue on the belly is automatically graded as a Bluebelly unless the blueness extends over into the back, in which case it is a III. If a pelt is a bluebelly and is also more than very slightly shot, it will drop down to "Shot" or perhaps even to III.

Where a pelt is only partly bluish on the belly, chiefly around the paws, and where perhaps 80 to 90 percent of the belly is prime, the pelt will be graded as Slightly Bluebelly, if it is undamaged on the back.

If it is slightly shot and the belly is slightly blue, it goes in with the Slightly Shot pelts. However, the proportion of pelts with slightly blue bellies is so small that the number having both these defects is almost negligible.

A regular II squirrel usually has a slightly browner or redder skin than a I, which may denote a slightly poorer quality of fur. It must be as free from damage as a grade I skin.

In the early part of the season, the II's may be only slightly inferior to the I's. As the season progresses, however, the proportion of undamaged pelts in which the skin is browner or redder, or even very slightly spotted, becomes much larger. The quality of the fur of these pelts becomes correspondingly poorer until finally, late in the season, it is quite thin and sometimes matted as well. This kind of pelt is still catalogued as II, which it is, but buyers will mark their catalogues as "late II." or "very late II," and the lots always bring considerably less money. A II, then, is a whole undamaged skin, prime-bellied but not quite at the peak of seasonableness.

It is a little hard to describe the grade Slightly Shot but, in effect, it is a pelt that has one small shot, or is slightly damaged, on the body part of the skin; or even a pelt with two very small holes as long as they are away from the main part of the back. Otherwise, the quality of the pelt is equivalent to that of a I, or to that of a pelt graded Slightly Bluebelly, as mentioned above. At the height of the season, buyers are quite anxious to buy the Slightly Shots which, apart from their slight damage, are mostly of grade I quality and have a better general appearance than the II's. The degree of damage is never such that it cannot be mended at a very small cost after dressing when the pelt will be worth just about as much as a I.

You may wonder why graders bother to separate the II's, the Slightly Shots, the Slightly Bluebellies and even perhaps the best of the Bluebellies. They are really all II's and usually bring very close to the same price. In many other types of fur they would be lumped together and as a matter of fact, some dealers do just this and offer them all together. However, the main reason for offering the II's for sale by auction separated into the different types is that they definitely sell better this way. They look far more uniform and some buyers are willing to pay a premium price to obtain the kind that best suits their particular purpose.

Then there is the grade of Shot, or Shot and Damaged, which is self-explanatory. These pelts are still usable but will require more work to mend them.

Grade III includes both the badly damaged and the unprime pelts. In some markets these two are sold separately but in others they move better as one grade. Badly damaged III's have shot or other small holes in important parts of the back, or they may have one larger hole.

Unprime III's may be bluebellies where the dark color is extended over the belly onto the back; or, in later collections, overprime pelts that have developed either large black spots or a general darkness of the back; or, perhaps, really springy pelts, usually brownish, that are very light-skinned and lacking in fur.

The lowest grade is IV, which consists of rejects, including summer pelts with very little fur, tainted or badly damaged skins and, in fact, all the other pelts of very little value.

One more type of pelt should be referred to – the one that has a red snare mark across its back. Such pelts are included with the II's in some markets but they really should be graded lower and marked "shot and damaged" or "badly damaged," according to the extent of the damage, since in many cases the fur will come out in the dressing.

In some markets slightly tainted pelts are sold separately and sometimes more-tainted ones are, also. However, in most areas there are not enough of either to justify this. Sometimes, also, you may see the description "Pinholes." This is not really a grade but signifies the best of the Slightly Shot, which are occasionally sold separately.

Wild Mink

There are so many types of mink in Canada and the United States that a whole book could be written about them. They vary in size, length of fur, color, texture and all other features.

Even within the area covered by Alberta and the section north of it up to the Arctic ocean, we have a number of distinctively different types. To avoid confusion I will not go into this too thoroughly, but will just give you some general ideas.

First there are the giant W.A.'s, or Western Arctic types, that come from up around the mouth of the MacKenzie River in the delta country. These are as big as, or bigger than, any wild mink anywhere else and yet – what is very unusual in a big mink – they still have a fine silky fur that is neither spiky nor coarse. When they are at their best, their fur also has a fine blue-black color. No wonder the top grade brought $100 a pelt in a sale a few years ago. Despite being stretched with a proper proportional width, it is not unusual for males to measure 25 to 26 inches or even more in length, and females 21 to 22 inches, which is as big as the largest males in most areas.

Moving southward to the MacKenzie River Area, the mink (M.K.R's) are not so large but they still have very dense silky fur with fine coloring. To the east of this area, the size is really quite small, but in the Fond du Lac area the colors are still fine. To the southeast, in northern Saskatchewan near Uranium City, Stoney Rapids, and so on, the mink are small and the color tends to be browner, and the same applies farther east at Brochet.

In northern Alberta and the Peace River District, the mink have a strong, rather-long fur, which is not coarse but nearly as silky as the M.K.R.'s. Colors also seem to run browner, on the average. Farther south, the mink are quite large but colors are generally brown, and in some areas the fur is quite hairy and coarse – too bushy for coats or jackets but quite useful for stoles.

Mink in Saskatchewan and Manitoba vary roughly along the same lines. Manitoba is known mainly for its good-sized, fine type produced in the northeastern area along the Hudson's Bay Railway and also for its southwestern type. The latter are heavily furred, a little bushy, and of exceptionally good sizes – not unlike the mink found just south of the border in North Dakota.

Traveling east, the type of mink changes abruptly as you hit the Precambrian Shield with its rocky lakes. Here they are generally undersized, light- and white-skinned, and with a very short "nap," or length of fur.

All the mink east of Manitoba, right to the Atlantic, could be described as medium to small and generally of good, dark-bluish color when seasonable. The texture of the fur varies considerably from quite coarse, in mink in southeastern Ontario, to the finest of all mink – the Interior Labrador – which is exceptionally silky, although densely furred, and of fine, extra-dark coloring.

Jumping back again to British Columbia, we have three main types of mink. The small fine dark Interiors; the Coast, which have a very short nap, almost like

that of mink in northwestern Ontario, but a very heavy skin, indeed; and finally the Semi-Coast, or Gulf, type which are fresh-water mink (as opposed to the Coast type near salt water) and live up the inlets. These are much fuller-furred than the Coast mink, though perhaps not as densely furred as in most other areas. Coast and Semi-Coast mink, especially, are of very good size, though they are usually stretched more narrow than they should be. Their color is brownish and generally rather pale.

Feed seems to be the main factor controlling the variations in all these different types, although environment also has its effect. Mink seem to need a good supply of red meat, such as rabbits, muskrats, frogs, mice and the like, to produce a good-sized, firm-skinned, densely furred pelt. Where a diet of fresh water fish or salt water shellfish is all that is available, a poorer pelt results.

Color is affected by environment, especially shade. Good shade is available in heavily forested areas, and also under the ice at the mouth of the MacKenzie River when the river level drops after freeze-up and leaves an air space.

Alkalinity, or absence of this, in water seems to have an effect on the color of mink as well as of other animals, especially those that live in the water – such as beaver and muskrat.

So much for a very general idea of districts as they affect mink. Although they also affect all other types of animals, the differences seems much more marked in mink. It is only by experience that you can tell which type of mink each area produces and into what price range it will fit.

As mentioned earlier, the most important difference between the mink in any area is color. Second-best colors, even in the best areas, are usually worth at least 25 percent less than mink of the top color for these areas. The reason for this is that there are so few mink of the top colors produced in the world each year. European buyers, the principal customers for these luxury furs, fight it out for the select lots but are not so anxious for the next best as there are always more of them available.

Despite the many wealthy people in the United States, this market is no longer in competition for our wild mink. The flashy colors of ranched mutation mink and the jet black of the finest ranched dark mink are considered more fashionable and, from the manufacturer's point of view, are also much easier to match up for garments.

It is extremely difficult for anyone who is not an expert to detect the very fine differences in the shades of the best-colored mink. All one can say is that, in order to qualify for the top lots, a mink pelt must be perfect in skin and fur, with very clear, bluish-black top hair and a dark-bluish underfur, and there must not be the slightest trace of brown in that color, let alone red. Such pelts really sparkle – almost like diamonds.

The next-best colors in mink are lighter or browner but still have to be completely free of any trace of redness in the fur.

The rules for grading are pretty much the same for mink from all areas, with

one notable exception in those from the best areas. The color of the fur is so important that sometimes a well-colored pelt that still has a rather bluish skin may be worth as much as a fully prime pelt of second-best color. The reason is that these finest-colored mink have their best color for only a short time before priming up and a still shorter time, sometimes only a few days, *after* priming up. The fur on these slightly blue-skinned pelts is not of absolutely first quality, as the top hair has not fully completed the process of coming through; nevertheless, buyers are willing to overlook this in view of its attractive blue-black color. I must repeat that this applies only to a few pelts in the very finest areas and, in general, the rules for grading mink are uniform regardless of the area they came from.

Actually, the most important basic fact to remember about mink grading is that a singed mink, even if the curling of the hairs is quite slight, is worth half or less the price of a comparable straight-haired one. The more valuable a pelt is, the more drastic the cut in price because of singeing. Another thing – if a pelt is very springy, with the top hair badly "hooked" or singed (or even matted, twisted and low), it could hardly be worth less if it had been taken in August; its value must be figured at no more than 20 to 25 percent of that of a seasonable pelt of second-best color of the same size from the same area of the country.

It is terribly hard to convince a trapper that a fine large pelt with a slightly bucky, red skin is worth almost nothing compared with what his earlier pelts realized, even some that were quite a bit smaller. Nevertheless, it is true. This is because of the different uses to which the various grades of pelts are put. Fully seasonable pelts are used in fine garments such as coats, jackets, capes, stoles and similar articles.

Once a mink is "singed" or "springy" it is quite unsuitable for these purposes, though occasionally some of the pelts that are not too badly affected may be used in cheaper garments. Most such pelts are used for trimmings of the cheaper kind and there is a very strict price limit on what can be paid by manufacturers for them, since the pelts are competing with the millions of cheap ranched mink produced in eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Apart from this very important question of singeiness, the grading of wild mink follows along quite normal lines. Since they are displayed skin out, the first judgment is made on the appearance of the skin, but the fur of every pelt is also carefully examined.

The question of early bluish skins has already been referred to. Usually, these appear only in the early sales and are put up in lots of their own. There is no mistaking this blueness. Also, the fur looks and feels woollier than usual, and the skin tends to be a little heavier and leathery. These pelts are graded as II's unless the skin is very dark, or almost black, when they drop to III's. The fur on bluish skins varies. In some, the top hair coverage has almost completely come through, whereas in other, earlier pelts, not necessarily much darker skinned, there is mostly underfur, with not much top hair showing.

The same rules as usual apply to damaged pelts. Damage has to be very slight

indeed, and in an unimportant place for a pelt to still qualify as a I or Best II. Anything definitely damaged drops to regular II, and if it is tainted, mouse-damaged, clipped or with bare or badly damaged spots, it must go into the badly damaged category.

When there is any doubt as to the state of the fur towards the center and head of the pelt, especially if mouse nibbling or a bare spot is suspected, it is a good idea to open the pelt up to make a tube and, facing the tail end, to look up this towards the light. In this way, one should be able to spot any serious defects in the fur.

One more, quite-prevalent type of damage, which is very noticeable sometimes in certain areas, shows up as a lot of black spots all over the skin, especially on the bottom half. These spots are bite marks from fights that may have occurred as long ago as the previous summer or even in the spring mating season. This damage is especially common in male pelts and occurs mainly at the beginning of the season. Buyers claim that after a pelt is dressed the fur will show small bare spots wherever these marks occur.

There have been years when mink from some areas were so covered with these marks that it was not possible to put up any really clean, top lots. All that could be done was to put the pelts that were the least marked in one lot, those that were the most badly marked in another lot, and the rest in a third lot.

Pelts in later parcels of mink sometimes show signs of lateness, or of singeiness, referred to earlier, and must be downgraded accordingly. Seconds in later sales seldom contain unprime pelts. The few that might occur, although still technically II's, would stand out and look so out of place that they would likely be downgraded to III's. Actually, very few unprime pelts are seen after December and January.

Most seconds in the later sales have a reddish or brownish skin, especially in the shoulder area, where although you can't see it, there also will be less fur. The fur, in general, tends to be slightly singed and usually quite brownish or reddish in color.

Most grade III pelts in the same sales have these same defects, but to a greater degree. The fur is either definitely singed or quite woolly and, perhaps, matted or muddy.

Any damage, whether slight or definite, has more or less the same effect on the grading of later assortments as it does on the grading of earlier ones.

Otter

In many ways an otter pelt is similar to that of a mink, though it is larger, and it is subject to very much the same considerations in grading.

Color, again, is extremely important. The best extra-dark or dark pelts are found in Ontario and the other eastern provinces, with very few in the West. The color of all pelts, even the paler ones, must be clear and free of any redness to realize a good price.

Western otter are not as silky as those in the East and, being generally larger, they have a heavier skin. As a result, garments made from them are not as light and supple as those made from eastern pelts.

On the British Columbia Coast, there is an otter that is exceptionally large and heavy-skinned, with comparatively short-napped fur. This is not to be confused with the sea otter, which it has been illegal to catch for many years. The sea otter is also very large but its fur is very heavy, dense, beautiful and silky.

To be classed within the top grade of I and Best II, an otter must be free from damage, other than perhaps one small neat seam or a small shothole away from the center of the back. The pelt must be prime and must have straight, unsinged top hair with dense deep underfur. There must be a nice, solid, thick feel to the quality, with the underfur so plushy that the skin cannot be felt through it.

Where a pelt is shown skin out, as are the majority, the quality of the fur can be easily felt by inserting the whole hand into the pelt after laying it, with the back down, on the table. After turning the pelt over, with the belly down, the tail can be lifted up and the fur examined for color and singeiness.

A fur-out pelt should be checked for singeing and color, both on the table (with the pelt belly down and back up) and if necessary, by holding it up and looking at the fur against the light. Seams and damage are less obvious in fur-out pelts and must be searched for carefully, both visually and with the tips of the fingers.

Bluish-skinned pelts, good damaged pelts, and slightly singed, good-quality pelts must be graded as II's. Late in the season, pelts with reddish or brownish skin, especially on the shoulders, are also graded as Seconds, as the fur on these tends to be quite flat and springy, exactly as in wild mink. Some springy pelts also have scattered dark spots on the skin side.

A III may be a really early or a late badly springy or singed pelt, or one with weak fur, or one that has a long seam or other noticeable, bad damage. A pelt that is average except for a burnt tail would probably end up in the damaged category, after the tail has been cut off. The few pelts that are burnt on the back or belly, or that are very badly damaged, or of otherwise very poor quality, are kept out and sold separately. These are of extremely low value.

For grading purposes, otters are divided into two size ranges XL and L, and M and S. A parcel of pelts can be very easily separated into these sizes but, for the benefit of anyone who may get the odd single pelt alone, western X-Large and Large pelts measure roughly 36 to 40 inches from the nose to the root of the tail and eastern ones slightly less. This, of course, is for pelts stretched normally, so that they are about 8 inches wide a few inches up from the tail.

Cubs are of little value but a few reach the market from time to time and are usually used for caps. Most of them lack top hair and are only a very few inches long.

As mentioned earlier, the question of singeing in otter is more important now than ever, since it is fashionable to use the fur unplucked, with the top hair still on.

However, even if the pelts are to be plucked, singeiness lowers their value, as affected pelts almost always have an off-color, brownish or reddish underfur.

Beaver

If we count the sizes, beaver is graded into more different groups by far than any other type of fur. This is true, even though in the lower grades two or three sizes are sometimes sold together as one lot. Size must be considered the most important factor, since this varies greatly in different pelts and, whether used for garment or collar, the total area of fur is what counts.

Beaver pelts are usually measured by adding together the length from the edge at the butt end to the eye holes on the head and the width across the widest part from edge to edge. Since the edges usually have numerous points where lacing or nails stretched them during drying, it should be pointed out that all measurements are from the indents and not from these points.

In European and some other markets, measurements are taken up to the edge of the head, which increases the measurement by from 1 to 2 1/2 inches. This means the inclusion of a number of pelts that otherwise would be put in the next size down and, in the long run, nothing is gained since it just means that the buyers will pay less for lots including such pelts. Here, I will discuss the generally accepted Canadian standards.

Sometimes pelts are received that are rather diamond-shaped, but this is a mistake on the trapper's part and does not fool anyone. If measured in the normal way, these pelts appear to be a size larger than they really are. However, buyers do not like them and, instead, measure the shortest length plus the shortest breadth, which puts them down in size, even below where they should have been if properly stretched. For this reason, graders must also downgrade such pelts.

On the other hand, if a pelt is stretched almost in a perfect circle, the trapper is cheating himself and losing out on the total measurement. The best shape is a uniform oval – a natural shape obtained without overstretching the skin in any direction. This is dealt with in greater detail later, under "Handling."

Quite apart from the above, overstretching tends to thin out the fur. An overstretched pelt can easily drop one or two grades in quality, and lose more in value than was gained by any increase in size.

The size for an XXL beaver, or "blanket" as it is often called, is 65 inches or over, measured as above. In some areas where the beavers run especially large, another size called "super" or "superblanket" is used. This size of pelt measures 72, or sometimes 70, inches. Where only a few of these occur, they are usually grouped with the XXL. Pelts over 60 inches are called XL, and those over 55 inches are Large.

The biggest of the medium-sized pelts are usually kept out separately and are called Large Mediums if 52 inches or over. This is because such pelts look out of place if put with the ordinary Mediums (48 inches and up) and Smalls (under 48

inches), as they make both of these look smaller than they are by contrast. In most assortments there are very few Large Mediums, compared with the number of regular Mediums and Smalls.

The general rules for grading Large sizes also apply in grading the Large Medium, Medium and Small sizes, and the same things have to be looked for.

Cubs, which are really small and very flat or woolly, are of little value and belong in the lowest grade of small sizes.

When it comes to quality, as mentioned earlier, beaver and muskrat are the only two exceptions to the rule that an animal is not fully furred till its skin is completely prime and free from blueness or blue areas.

Measuring beaver pelts

Though, ideally, a beaver should be completely prime-skinned and fully formed and furred to rate being a I, in actual fact it is generally accepted that when the fur of a beaver is at its best its skin is still partly bluish. It should be noted, however, that this unprimeness is of a special kind. The skin, though bluish, should have a healthy, oily, shiny appearance.

If the skin is bluish, dull and rather lifeless in appearance this means that the pelt was taken too early. The underfur on an early pelt like this is very short and the top hair, what there is of it, has nothing to support it – altogether a poor flat pelt of little value. Sometimes a trapper will freeze-dry this kind of pelt, which turns the skin a kind of mottled white color. However, this looks quite different

from real primeness as the skin is not as smooth as it should be and there are often small patches of dark color showing through. Above all, the fur will be flat and of poor quality.

The quality of beaver fur is checked by using the tips of the slightly bent fingers of the left hand, rather than the sides of the fingers or the edge of the palm as in the long-haired furs.

Nearly all pelts, except those in the lower grades, have such a luxuriant heavy cushion of good-quality fur on the sides that it is impossible to feel the skin through it. Therefore, the grade of a beaver cannot be judged on its side fur alone. However, the area at the center of the back between the shoulders gives a really true indication of its quality.

In a top-quality pelt, this area has a good solid cushion of fur, almost as much as on the sides, and it is quite impossible to feel the skin underneath.

It is also important to feel the fur in the center of the back down farther, maybe 5 or 6 inches from the tail end. Sometimes the beaver rubs his back there going in and out of his house, so that the underfur may be weak even though the top hair appears to be complete.

The proportion of Grade I, best-quality pelts varies considerably according to the area as well as the time of year. A beaver needs to be almost perfect to qualify for this grade. In some markets, it is possible to put up a few lots of prime, top-quality pelts as I's separately from the Best II's. However, in most areas the supply of I's is limited and these pelts are usually combined with the Best II's and marked I and Best II.

The next grade down is the regular II, sometimes referred to as "Good II," or even as "Ordinary II," but let's just call them II. These represent a substantial proportion of the whole in each size group. They are still very presentable, good quality pelts without any serious defects or blemishes.

Most II pelts have a slight lowness in the center of the back, which feels flatter to the finger tips, perhaps chiefly between the shoulders, but more usually all the way down.

The top hair may be sparse here and there, or even completely rubbed off in small areas, such as around the rear paws. Sometimes the top hair is missing from a small rubbed spot, perhaps the size of a dime or a quarter, on the shoulders, but careful examination shows absolutely no damage to the underfur. If the top hair is rather thin all over, the pelt must be downgraded to III, even though the underfur seems compact and complete. Buyers are afraid that such a pelt may have come from a sick animal and that the underfur may thin out, too, in the dressing process. Rubbed areas around the rear paws, referred to above, must not be too noticeable. Rubbing off of the top hair may not seem to be very important, since the pelt is to be plucked anyhow, but often the underfur is also slightly damaged. In addition, buyers sometimes feel that this rubbing indicates other weaknesses which, though not so obvious, may nevertheless exist. This is why any pelt having a definitely clipped or rubbed area must be dropped to the slightly damaged category.

In the winter, the skin side of a II will probably be quite normal – white, or partly bluish. It may be a little too blue, or dark, for grade I and Best II but it must not be black, as such pelts belong with the III's.

Later in the season, a parcel of II's would contain a large number of pelts with speckly, darker skin, especially in the shoulder area. As explained in an earlier section, these pelts will lose some of their underfur during dressing and are therefore considerably less desirable and bring less money than earlier pelts. Pelts that are really late and springy should be lotted together and sold separately, so as not to spoil any parcels of normal II's.

For some reason or other, pelts from the far North and from western Ontario seem to show more springiness, and show it earlier, than those from most other areas. In any case, it is most important to remember that, even though a late springy beaver may still grade as a II, it may actually be worth little more in dollars and cents than a III was in an earlier winter assortment.

Any pelt of I and Best II or regular II quality that has a defect that can be removed without too much labor, and without too great a loss in fur area, should be graded as Slightly Damaged. Such pelts may have a slight clipping or rub, as referred to earlier, or they may have a small shot hole or small seam. A tainted pelt, however small the area affected, would never be put in this grade, since it is assumed the damage may spread. Such a pelt is always graded as Badly Damaged.

Usually Slightly Damaged lots will be of rather better quality than regular II because they include some top-quality skins. However, they usually sell for about 10 percent less than II's of the same size and are picked up by buyers from Eastern Canada, where labor costs for mending are lower than in the United States.

Sometimes there is a series of black lines on the skin side of a pelt, usually at the butt end. These are assumed to be scars from fights during the previous year. As the fur tends to be loose around these marks, the pelt must be downgraded. Occasionally, a very slightly marked skin might squeeze into the II grade but it would more likely be graded as Slightly Damaged. If the marks are numerous and noticeable the pelt has to go in with the III's.

The III grade consists of poor quality and ordinary damaged pelts. In the winter, a typical III has quite a darkish-blue skin but, most important, the fur is harsh to the touch; as underfur is lacking, it is possible to feel the skin through the fur almost all over. Any really noticeable damage, to either the fur or the skin, downgrades the pelt to a III, no matter how good the quality of the fur may be otherwise.

A slightly tainted pelt, where the fur is loose only in a small spot, may go in with the III's, but never a burnt one. Late in the season there may be fewer dark-skinned pelts, but there will still be some poor-quality, hairy ones to go into the III category. Grade III's of the three large sizes – XXL, XL and L – are sold together in some markets, but separately in others.

The next grade below III is Large Badly Damaged, which includes any XXL, XL or L pelts with a large spot of damage or with a number of small damaged areas.

Definitely tainted pelts and summer, flat pelts with very little fur also belong in this grade. Damaged Large Medium pelts (52 to 54 inches) may be included in this grade, but damaged M and S go into the lowest grade, which also includes burnt pelts of all sizes. Sometimes, if there are enough flat early pelts, they are sold separately as IV's, but there will not be much difference in price. Also, large-sized burnt skins may be put up separately, if there are enough of them.

In markets where very large quantities of the various sizes are sold (notably in Eastern Canada), it is often possible to sell each size of each grade separately. However, in some markets, only two grades of Large Mediums are sold – I and Best II, and II – and the LM III's are put in with the Mediums and Smalls. In this case, the Medium I and Best II pelts, and the Small I and Best II, would be put up in separate lots. The M and S II would be sold together in the same lots; and the LM, M and S III would be sold together.

Most beaver from Ontario and eastward are of good color and are in demand, especially by buyers from Europe, for use in their natural colors. Comparatively few Ontario beaver are used for collars or trimming, as they are either too expensive or the fur is not heavy enough for this purpose. The western and northwestern beaver, being less silky and more woolly, are more suitable for collars.

In grading beaver from the West and North, the occasional better colors must be ignored, as they are not likely to be used natural anyway – apart from a few from the northern MacKenzie River section.

Color is important in western beaver, only in that it should show no redness. In the late winter and spring careful watch must be kept for pelts on which the underfur has assumed a coppery tinge, especially the top part of the underfur and most particularly on the flanks, the area most likely to be affected. Pelts that are badly off-color must be discounted by as much as 30 to 40 percent off what would otherwise be the price for their grade and size. Buyers claim the reddish pelts will not take dye well, especially the lighter colors, and they make the process more expensive. This spring redness is more noticeable in southwestern areas than elsewhere.

In some parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan a very pale, almost silvery beaver is produced, sometimes in the middle of areas where most beaver are of a normal color. For some reason or other, the fur on these pale beaver is generally of very good quality, with a lot of dense underfur. Such pelts are usually put up and sold separately in the better grades and they sell at a premium, since they take light-colored dyes very well, with a minimum of bleaching.

Black beaver are sometimes produced in the East and sell for high prices if they are of good quality. The few that occur in the West are almost invariably flattish and of poor quality.

A few Piebald beaver occur every year. These have irregular white patches, especially on the flanks. They are worth very little, regardless of quality, since they must be dyed a dark color, and will take the dye unevenly.

Before leaving beaver, I should say that grade titles in the East vary from those in the West to some extent, and they even vary slightly throughout the West. I have stuck to the titles used for other types of fur, in order to avoid confusion.

Although western I's and Best II's are described in the East as "I and No. 2," which is the same thing, graders there describe our II as "I and II," and the rough equivalent of our III as "II."

Muskrat

Muskrats used to be called Musquash, and still are in Europe.

Canada still uses a large quantity of muskrats. Interest here is confined generally to the larger, heavier, better-furred pelts. These include pelts from the best areas in the United States, where very few muskrats are used nowadays.

Muskrat

The remainder of the Canadian and United States' production of these furs is absorbed in Europe, where they are used for linings, trimmings, collars and hats, as well as for coats. In European markets, our muskrats also have to meet the competition of enormous quantities now produced in Siberia and other parts of Russia. Muskrats did not exist in Russia until live Canadian animals were transported and released there.

At one time, a great many muskrat pelts were used in their natural colors, but today most of them are dyed, especially to imitate mink.

Usually the belly is separated from the back and used for different purposes. Jackets are almost never made of backs, which would be too bulky, but of flanks or bellies, which are more suitable for this purpose and also for linings.

A large proportion of muskrat pelts, particularly the damaged ones, are made into "plates" – pelts sewn together into an oblong – or, alternatively, into "shells," which are shaped suitably for making into the bodice and sleeves of coats. Then other manufacturers, often in a different country, make these plates or shells into garments.

In Western Canada, practically all muskrat pelts are handled skin out, and an experienced fur buyer can tell almost all he wants to know by a glance at the skin. A few pelts are still handled fur out, chiefly in Quebec, Labrador and the Maritimes.

Generally speaking, the fur quality of a muskrat is at its best in the late winter, just before the skin becomes fully prime and while it still has a certain amount of blueness on it. A short time after it becomes fully prime, both the skin and fur begin to get thin, first between the shoulders, and later on, all over.

I may as well trace this cycle through, as grading really depends on the stage at which the pelt was taken.

In the fall, the skin of muskrat is either dark all over or has very pronounced black marks. The younger animals, which of course are rather small, have very little top hair at all – mostly just underfur. Adults may be quite large but their fur is thin and of very poor quality and, even though there may be a little more top hair, there is not much underfur to support it.

By early winter, there is plenty of underfur although there may still be some woolliness because the top hair has not reached its full length. Sometimes these pelts are of surprisingly good quality, though the skin is still quite black in some areas. The skin feels and looks oily, rather than dry as in fall pelts.

These early winter muskrats usually sell well in the early sales, but suffer by comparison when more-seasonable pelts are offered at sales later on.

The mid-winter and late-winter pelts are highly desirable, especially for the Canadian trade. The former still have a fair amount of blueness, the latter only a little. The skin has a nice moist, healthy appearance and the fur is at its best. There is a complete covering of top hair and the underfur is dense. If you insert your hand inside the pelt, you will feel a resistance everywhere and, as you move your hand towards the head, the fur will come up between your fingers.

The next change that takes place in muskrats is that the skin gradually gets lighter, or thinner. The first place to go is between the shoulders, as in most animals. If you hold the pelt between your thumb and first finger of both hands, you can wrinkle it back and forth quite easily, showing that the skin is thin. With an earlier, heavy-skinned pelt it is hard to make this movement. Strangely enough, in a small proportion of pelts (probably the oldest of the adults) the neck skin gets thicker and stiff, or boardy, at this stage. However, the fur on these pelts, as well as on the ones with thin-skinned necks, gets appreciably thinner in this area.

In the next stage, the skin becomes dry and reddish or brownish. Following that, a kind of yoke mark appears, more or less similar to that in a "springy" beaver. Such a muskrat pelt is described as "late," or "springy," or is called a "shedder." The last name is perhaps the most descriptive, as both the top hair and, to some extent, the underfur start to fall out during this stage. This is most detrimental as, naturally, it ruins the appearance and usefulness of the pelt when it is dressed. Although the skin does not usually become bare, the fur is thin and there will be patches where there is little or no top hair after dressing. In the final stages, the skin of a muskrat darkens again and becomes very light in weight, and the fur gets very thin. By this time, since the pelt is almost worthless, there should be no question of the animal being trapped and it should be left to produce crops in future years. All these changes vary in degree and in timing with the amount and quality of feed and the quality and depth of the water.

Muskrats that come from sloughs and shallow lakes nearly always have thin, or even papery skin. Neither their skin nor their fur ever gets heavy and strong, probably chiefly because of poor feed. Also, if the water is alkaline, they are usually pale in color.

The biggest muskrats and those with the heaviest skin and fur usually come from lakes where there is an abundance of wild rice, as in many parts of Ontario, or of water lilies (of which they eat the roots), as in some parts of Wisconsin.

In grading muskrats, the area of fur is most important, as it is in beaver. Therefore, the pelts are sorted according to size. Most markets combine Extra-Large and Large pelts into one group, and Medium and Small into another; but in some places, and with pelts from some areas, the XL are sold separately. Sometimes the large Mediums, especially winter pelts, are also kept separate from the regular Mediums, which go in with the Small. Since the large Mediums are often understretched pelts with good heavy skin and fur, they usually sell to advantage this way.

XL pelts must measure over 16 inches and Large over 14 inches in length. Everything else belongs in Medium and Small, except extra-small pelts, which are kept out so as not to spoil the appearance of the others. In width, XL and L pelts should measure at least 6 inches at the butt and M and S 4 1/2 to 5 inches.

In spring lots, a small proportion of extra-small pelts are found that are prime-skinned, or nearly so, and of good quality. These sell well when kept out, as they can be used in making ladies' hats, but, of course, they are worth much less than regular M and S.

If the fur on extra-small pelts is of ordinary or poor quality, even if the skin is prime (or if it is bluish, when the fur is usually mousy and lacking in top hair), the pelts are sold as "kitts" and have very little value indeed. The fur area is so small, and the quality so poor, that kitts are no good for anything but linings.

Pelts taken in the fall months, or "Falls," as they are commonly called, are usually sorted into two sizes, with the kitts taken out. They occur chiefly in the early sales and are put up separately from pelts taken a little later. Most of the large

Falls are of poor quality but sometimes in the smaller sizes there are a few better-quality pelts (though not good), which can be sold separately. Damaged pelts – usually few in number – are kept out, of course, and sold separately.

Early winter pelts are graded similarly to the Falls except that their size is much more uniform and their quality much more useful. With the Early Winters it is simply a question of taking out the weaker pelts and, usually, putting them in with the Falls. Pelts with pinholes may be left in but damaged ones are taken out and sold on their own.

There are not very many XL and L pelts, proportionally, at this stage, and it may be advantageous to include the large M's with the so-called XL and L pelts, which are really mostly only Large. That is enough about the Falls and Early Winters, which in Canada represent only a very small proportion of the annual crop. Let us now move on to the Winters and Springs which comprise the bulk.

Normally the Winters are sold separately from the Springs, but sometimes Late Winters, which have only slight bluish markings, are put with the Springs instead of with the regular Winters. It depends on the uniformity of the pelts being graded and on the proportion of Winters in the parcel. The main objective is to put up something that looks as uniform as possible to the buyer, with no pelts that stand out and make the lot look mixed.

Even apart from this, Winters tend to be separated automatically from Springs in the grading because of their heavier skin. Therefore, as long as you keep out the Falls and Early Winters, it is probably best to consider Winters and Springs as one thing and to leave it to the auction to decide how they are further split up.

Now let us discuss the grades. A I must be a pelt with no blemish whatever. There must be not the slightest sign of damage, not even a pinhole, except perhaps in the head. It must show no signs of lateness; it must be well furred, both as to top hair and underfur; and the skin must be firm all over, including between the shoulders; and it must not be easy to "crinkle." This sounds like perfection, but actually it is surprising how many excellent pelts occur in a good seasonable parcel.

The Second grade (II), contains pelts that are still very useful but not quite perfect. The skin of a II may be lighter in weight or, alternatively, not quite so well furred. It may be slightly late, but not shedding.

Pelts that have very superficial or slight damage, such as one or two tiny shot holes or a short seam anywhere except in the center of the back, should be classified as Seconds. Actually, graders make a separate grade of these and call them pinholes, but this is for the sake of uniformity, and they can all be considered as roughly in the same price range.

Here, I should mention two kinds of small red marks to watch for. Sometimes on the skin you will see a number of marks that have been made by pellets from a shotgun. Since they have not perforated the hide, you may think they are unimportant. However, these may develop into bare spots or holes during dressing and the buyer, of course, assumes that they will. Therefore, no matter how perfect the pelt is otherwise, it must be downgraded at least to a II or, probably, to a Damaged.

The other kind of small red marks to look for on a muskrat skin are caused by fighting and biting in the spring. Sometimes these marks look quite trivial, but any pelt that has them must be graded just as if there was a hole right through the skin. Certainly, when the pelt is dressed, there will be damage that will require mending, which always adds to the cost and cuts down the fur area.

Any pelt with noticeable damage belongs in the next grade – Damaged – but it must not be too badly shot up or bitten. There will probably be quite a lot of mending to do, as a Damaged pelt may have a number of small holes or one fairly large hole or seam, but there must still be a good-sized area that is undamaged. Pelts with damaged bellies are put into this grade unless the damage is so slight that they can squeeze into the II grade. The belly is always used and therefore is important. Late, shedding and other low-quality pelts are included in the Damaged grade, as is any pelt on which the fur is muddy or plastered together, even though it may actually be of good quality. Shedders usually are separated out at the auctions and are sold on their own. As far as grading is concerned, they can be considered as Damaged and are worth about the same.

Lastly, we have all the badly damaged pelts, whether bitten, torn or shot. Flat pelts that do not look like Falls also go into this lot, and so do all the tainted and burnt ones.

Usually, there are quite a number of tainted and burnt muskrats and you must watch carefully for them. What might otherwise be a $2 pelt is worth very little indeed if it is tainted or burnt, as this makes it almost unusable.

You can usually spot a tainted muskrat by its smell. Apart from this, you will probably see a greenish, shiny spot, or "window," on the skin. If you put your hand inside the pelt you can see your finger through this window and some of the fur will come away in your fingers if you pull it. Making a tunnel of the pelt and looking up it towards the light also helps reveal the tainted areas.

A burnt pelt has a shiny skin or one that appears corrugated, with a lot of little ridges caused by drying it too quickly, too near a fire. Such pelts break with an audible "crack" when folded. Very occasionally a pelt is found on which the fur has been singed by fire. This is hard to spot unless the damage is at the butt end of the pelt or unless you can smell the burnt hair.

"Drowned" muskrats usually have a fairly bright-reddish skin, the fur is plastered down, and a good proportion of them turn out to be tainted. Kitts, as described earlier, may also be included in this "junk" lot – for rough grading purposes, at any rate. This lot includes all sizes of pelts but usually contains more of the smaller ones, since the extent of damage that would allow a large pelt to be classified as Damaged would be much more serious on a smaller one. In the same way, an M or S pelt must be very slightly damaged indeed to get into the M or S II; anything very obvious is of so much more relative importance that the pelt must be downgraded to the M or S Damaged.

Above, I have suggested that lighter-skinned muskrats be downgraded to II, but I have not said too much more about weight.

When the United States and Canada were using large quantities of muskrats, pelts were usually sorted by weight into heavy, semi-heavy, light, and papery. If properly scraped, with no fat left on, the skin of a "heavy" pelt was solid leather all over and especially so between the shoulders. That of a "semi-heavy" was almost as solid, but was slightly more pliable. A "light" pelt was appreciably thinner-skinned all over. If you held it in two hands, one at each outside flank, or edge, where the back shades into the belly, you could move your hands back and forth and feel that the pelt was quite flexible all over. A pelt with thin "papery" skin, if handled in the same way, would feel almost, but not quite, like tissue paper and it would sound something like paper being wrinkled.

Because of our cold climate, the North American trade was mainly interested in the two top weights, except for garments made to sell on the West Coast, where it is milder. Also, on this continent there was little interest in smaller sizes because of the higher labor costs involved in making garments from them.

In Europe, on the other hand, a really prime spring pelt – light or even papery (if well furred) – was considered ideal for the climate. Now that Europe is absorbing the bulk of the crop, less emphasis is put on weight, but Canada, of course, still prefers the heavier pelts. Also, lately, West Germany has been quite interested in buying the biggest, and generally heaviest, pelts to use for collars on cloth coats.

Hudson Seal is muskrat that has been plucked, sheared and dyed to resemble fur seal. Only a very small proportion of pelts have ever been considered good enough for this purpose. The skin has to be firm and heavy all over and the underfur exceptionally dense. Only a few areas on the continent, where the feed is exceptionally good, produce muskrats good enough for Hudson Seal. The pelts have to be taken in the late winter, when the fur is at its best.

Hair Seal

Color is the most important consideration in grading hair seal. The quality and size of the pelt, and its freedom from damage, are other important factors. Basically, there are three distinct grades of hair seal and they are used for very different purposes. The top, or "Clear," grade consists of absolutely clean sealskins suitable for making into garments in their natural color. These bring a premium price. They must be free of blemishes and of any discoloration or stain. If there is a very slight yellowish tint or localized minor stain, the pelt may be graded as Slightly Stained, as it can be bleached clear and used in the same way as a Clear pelt. However, if it has any orange-colored stain, no matter how small, it cannot be included, since this is not removable.

Second-grade pelts are suitable for garments but are too yellowish or stained to use in their natural color and have to be dyed, usually a dark color. If they are badly orangy-stained, however, they will not take the dye and must be dropped to the bottom grade.

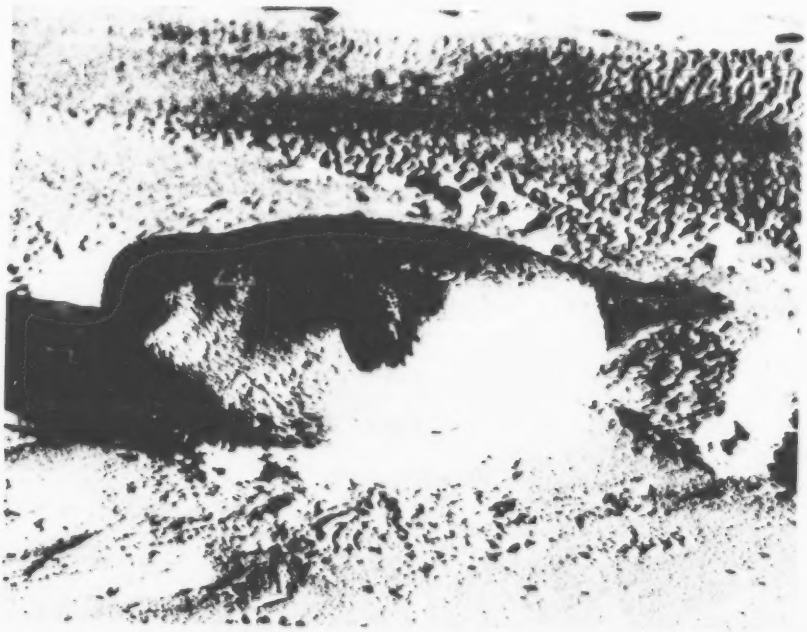
The bottom grade includes all the pelts that cannot be used for garments but which can be manufactured into moccasins and other footwear and novelties. Since

these represent quite a large proportion of the sealskins taken, the price is generally quite low. At times, in fact, it is too low even to justify the cost of transportation from the Far North.

No hair seal has very heavy fur but, to qualify for the first two grades, it must look sleek and be well covered with hair, which all points straight backwards. The hair must not be curly or, worse still, fuzzy, as this indicates the animal had started to lose its winter coat. It must not be absolutely flat, either, and must be free of any serious damage or flaw that would mar the pattern in a first-grade pelt, or be obvious even after dyeing a second-grade one.

Sometimes the grade Slightly Damaged is used for clean or slightly stained sealskins with minor damage that can be mended without spoiling the pattern. No matter how clean a pelt is, if it has a number of small scars or bare spots, usually in the front, it must be dropped right down. This is a very serious defect and will get worse in the dressing, when other similar spots will probably appear. Such pelts are usually referred to as "scarred."

In the first grade, the smaller pelts tend to be the brightest and most silvery and sometimes bring as much as the large ones. However, in the other grades, size is the most important factor and the bigger the pelt, the more valuable it is. Where the cost of dressing large sealskins is the same as for smaller ones, this lowers the cost per square inch of the large pelts considerably.



Hair seal

At one time, hair-seal pelts were used as "skins" for skiing. A strip was tied to each ski with the fur pointing backwards. In hill climbing the ski would slip forward freely but the sealskin, which would catch in the snow, prevented a backward slip. However, in these days of ski lifts few, if any, are used for this purpose.

There are a number of different types of seal, and some are described according to their appearance or age (which affects the appearance). For instance, the "ring" seal has a number of dark rings in the fur pattern and the "harp," found in eastern waters, has a harp-like pattern on its back. Greenland "bluebacks" are of an exceptionally nice, clear color. Some seals, such as the "harbor," are dark in color and not very valuable.

The so-called "square flipper" is an exceptionally large seal with a smooth greyish to white color. Its fur is deeper and more woolly, and can more correctly be referred to as "fur," than that of the other hair seals.

Large numbers of "whitecoats" are taken on the ice off the coasts of Quebec and Newfoundland each year, but very few are taken in the Arctic. These are the newly born pups of the harp seal. They are still covered with a coating of greyish-white wool, rather like a sheared sheepskin, which they shed before taking to the water.

The "fur seal" is a different animal altogether from the hair seal, as it has both top hair and underfur. The top hair is plucked during dressing. The handling of fur seals except by the government is prohibited and is also illegal by international agreement.

HANDLING PELTS

At first glance, you might think that the following information is of interest only to trappers. However, this is not the case. Anyone who has anything to do with raw furs – be it at auction, dealer, fur Co-op, trader or trapper level – should learn as much as he can about handling them. Any improvement in handling cannot but increase the value of furs to the benefit of all, since costly losses can occur all too easily on improperly handled pelts.

Scraping

Different trappers have different ideas about scraping tools. Some prefer a very sharp knife and others something quite blunt, such as a horse rib or plastic scraper. Both have their advantages. A sharp knife may be excellent in the hands of an expert, doing a very neat job. However, obviously, it would be easy for a less-experienced person to damage a pelt by cutting the skin if he did not hold the knife at the correct angle or use the right amount of pressure.

Whatever he uses, a trapper must be sure to remove all the fat and flesh from the skin. Failure to do this retards drying and can easily cause grease burn, described earlier, which makes even the best skin worthless.

Scraping, or fleshing, must be done while the pelt is green (fresh). Professional scrapers for centuries have used a beam for this purpose. As the name implies, this is a block of wood 4 to 5 feet long and rounded, on the top at any rate. A smooth, peeled log makes a perfect beam. If a very large log is to be used, it should be split in half, lengthwise, and the edges should be rounded off. Using a split log like this gives you more space underneath. Usually, one end of the log, or beam, is fastened to the ground at an angle and the scraper sits facing it, with the lower end between his legs.

The pelt is placed fur down on the rounded side of the beam, and is held in place by a couple of spring clips fastened to the ends of small ropes attached to the top of the beam. The operator works on the area between his knees and scrapes in the direction away from himself, using a two-handled knife like a spokeshave.

This method is ideal for open pelts, such as those of beaver or bear. In dressing establishments, muskrats and similar pelts are also handled in this way after being split down the middle of the belly. Incidentally, the only pelts a trapper should split are those of beaver, badger and bear. It requires an expert and a special form to do this accurately and any other cut in a muskrat or other pelt just has to be sewn up again.

Some people may find it easier to work on a beam fixed, at about shoulder height, to the wall of a cabin or shed and sloping down and out from the wall to the

Scraping a fox pelt

ground. If the edge of the pelt is held in spring clips on ropes attached to the wall and the pelt is laid along the beam, fur down, it is very convenient to scrape it with a knife working towards you. You can stand or sit, with one knee on either side of the beam and work at a convenient distance, on the part slightly below shoulder height. The rounded surface of the log or beam almost completely eliminates the risk of cutting the skin. If preferred, it is also quite convenient to work from the side of a beam suspended like this from a wall.

Scraping must always be done from the head of the pelt down towards the tail, with spring clips, of course, gripping the edges at the head end of the pelt to hold it in place.

It must be emphasized that the rounded surface of the log must be absolutely smooth and free from knots as, otherwise, cuts in the skin will be inevitable.

I realize that many an excellent job of scraping is done on pelts nailed to a wall or to boards, or laced to a frame. I believe, however, that the beam method is more convenient, especially for inexperienced scrapers.

Whole pelts that are going to be finished either fur out, as foxes, or skin out, as muskrats, cannot be scraped on a beam of this kind, since there would be a double thickness of skin and fur. Instead, a tapered cylinder or cone about one and a half times as long as the pelt to be scraped is very useful.

Needless to say, a cone that would hold a mink would not be big enough to handle a muskrat, let alone a fox or coyote. However, half a dozen cones of various sizes should be enough to fit all requirements. They are easy to make, by whittling down one end of a piece of a bough or small tree that is uniform in shape and free from irregularities. Of course, an even simpler way is to turn the cones on a lathe, if one is available. The finished shape is something like that of an artillery shell.

For scraping, a pelt is stretched fur-in on a suitable cone, with a screw eye holding the head in place and with clips, or perhaps an elastic band, over the rear paws holding down the rear end of the pelt. When stretched to its full length, the whole pelt should fit snugly against the surface of the cone.

It is usually helpful to have some kind of support for the bottom end. The ideal way is probably to have a central spindle through the middle and projecting at each end; then the whole thing can be held horizontally in two supports and rotated as required. This is the type of equipment used by mink ranchers and people who provide skinning services. They handle hundreds of thousands of pelts every season and find it most convenient. In their case, the scraping and turning is usually done mechanically.

When scraping mink, the first step is to clean the bottom end of the pelt – and a few inches up – by using rags, paper, sawdust or leaves to remove all surplus fat. This helps to avoid getting grease on the fur when the long scraping strokes are made later.

Although I have gone into this procedure at some length, I would like it clearly understood that I am only making suggestions. Other methods of scraping

have produced perfect pelts in the past and will continue to do so. Whatever method is found to be best and easiest should be used; the only *must* is that all meat and fat be removed.

It is easy enough to make a good job on a fox or lynx, whose pelt comes off easily, but there is room for improvement in many parts of the country on the handling of some of the other furs, especially beaver.

A weasel also skins fairly cleanly, but this tends to make people careless. The two pads of fat on the hips must be scraped off, if tainting there is to be avoided.

If the skin of a pelt is going to be seen, a smooth, oily appearance is desirable. I have heard of the use of steel wool to remove those last small fragments and to give the skin a slight polish (again, mostly in beaver).

One more very important thing: the skin must not be overscraped, so that the ends of the roots of the hair feel rough to the fingers and show through, either clearly or as very small dark spots. Overscraping is very bad indeed, as the hair will come out in dressing. It is most likely to happen on pelts that have a tough skin. such as bear, hair seal and – less frequently – beaver and mink.

As mentioned before, care should be taken to get as little grease as possible on the fur, as it will only have to be removed later. This is vitally important in white fox and hair seal where clearness of color is the main concern. It is also very important in mink, since the pelt is judged according to the condition of the fur around the tail. If this fur is plastered down with grease, it looks thinner than it should. In addition, this fur is so delicate that it is very difficult to clean without singeing.

Tails of all animals except muskrats and beavers should be split open and boned and then dried properly. Otherwise a tail may become tainted and lower the value of a whole pelt. Beaver and muskrat tails are of no value and should be discarded. Claws must be left on only in the case of all bears, where they definitely affect the value.

Lynx paws are usually left intact, but the claws should be removed as they can cause a painful slash very easily. In most other cases, however, I would say that it is desirable to cut off the feet since they are of no value and can skin the knuckles of an examiner. It does not seem to affect the value of foxes or wolves, or anything else for that matter, if their front paws are left out or tucked in. Perhaps the former is better since it removes any possible chance of tainting the back because of incomplete drying, although this is quite uncommon.

Cleaning

Fur dressers have found that the best way to clean fur is to put it in a slowly revolving drum with sawdust, or similar material, and then to get rid of the sawdust by putting the pelt in a second revolving drum, or "cage," made of wire netting. Steps inside the cage pick up and drop the pelt over and over again, and the sawdust drops out onto the floor. To help move the dirt and grease off the fur and onto the

sawdust, dressers may preheat the sawdust, or add a little cleaning fluid, or introduce steam into the first drum.

This method, though used successfully by fur dressers, can hardly be carried out by trappers, who use alternative ways of cleaning furs. Long-haired furs are usually drummed (cleaned, as above) on arrival at the auction, so that the trappers are saved the bother of cleaning them. However, there are certain things that they should do.

Any mud that may have plastered down some of the fur should be removed. This can be done when the mud is dry by beating the fur with a thick twig or cane. Drumming will clean the rest of the fur but cannot do much with fur that is plastered down to the skin. Blood stains are still worse, since blood mats the fur badly. Blood should be washed out with mild soap and lukewarm water (not hot water), using the fingers to separate the hairs from each other.

Often, trappers make a very neat job of mending a cut or tear or shot hole and then spoil the whole effect by failing to clean the matted fur around the edges. It is not that they wish to deceive buyers but, obviously, the more apparent the damage is the more the pelt is going to be discounted when offered for sale.

If a lynx, fox or coyote has been caught in a snare, the hair will probably be displaced and twisted together along the snare line. This mark should be removed as well as possible by combing.

Although white foxes will be drummed at the auction, it is important to clean them up as much as possible before sending them in. Any delay may cause a stain to set on the fur and it may soon be too late to remove it entirely by any means.

A white fox that shows any signs of yellowness should be washed in soap and water before stretching. It can be beaten lightly with a cane when dry if there is fur matted together. Alternatively, dry flour may be used to remove oil or grease from the fur. It must be rubbed well into the fur, and care must be taken to get rid of it afterwards by beating and shaking.

The question of resin, or pitch, in the fur of marten has already been referred to. It is difficult to remove but should be cleaned off if at all possible. It should first be softened by cleaning fluid, gasoline or whatever will do the trick and is available. (But, incidentally, coal oil should never be used for cleaning furs as you can never get rid of the odor.) Then the hairs should be pulled apart carefully and, only after that, combed gently, always remembering that every top hair that is lost in the combing costs money. Resin is also sometimes present in fisher fur and it should be dealt with in the same way. Some trappers say they avoid this trouble by not setting their traps on trees that have resin. However, this is a point on which I would hesitate to express an opinion.

It is in the short-haired furs that most can be gained by cleaning. Some trappers for years have made themselves an extra $3 to $5 per pelt on their larger sizes of beaver simply by thoroughly cleaning the fur.

Most water animals have an oily underfur, which tends to hold together near the skin. Though the fur is not matted, it appears to be less dense than it actually is. Washing such a pelt thoroughly with soap and water, and perhaps even scrubbing it with a brush, seems to separate the hairs of the underfur and improves the apparent quality and density of the fur.

With muddy pelts, the difference is even more obvious. It is almost impossible for a muddy beaver to grade better than a Third. Though a grader may believe that it is actually a good quality pelt, he dare not grade it higher in case buyers, at first glance, condemn it as flat. Brushing with a mechanical wire brush at the auction improves most pelts tremendously but it is hard to cope adequately with mud at this stage. So, by all means, the fur of beaver should be thoroughly washed with lukewarm water and a mild soap before stretching. Strong chemicals should never be used, as they may injure the skin. When the fur is dry, it can be brushed, combed, beaten or even "vacuumed" to fluff it up again.

Sometimes beaver fur contains sand; every effort should be made to get rid of this by beating and shaking. Otherwise, the fur seems harsh, coarse and of poor quality, and the pelt must almost invariably be downgraded.

The value of hair seal, like that of white fox, depends greatly on clearness of color. Therefore, it is very important to wash off any oil or grease on the pelt before it gets absorbed into the hair. A scrubbing brush can be used – but it must not be used against the set of the hair. That is to say, it should be used only from head to rear or slightly sideways. Otherwise, some of the hairs may become permanently twisted and spoil the smooth sleek appearance of the fur. Furriers "set" the fur on a fur coat by brushing it with a damp brush in the direction of the lay of the fur and this can be done to advantage on a raw hair seal.

I do not recommend putting too much effort into the cleaning of muskrat fur. The value is not there and any improvement is not very obvious, except in the case of drowned muskrats. The best quality muskrat in the world will appear thin and of poor quality if its fur is all plastered down. Matting is indicated by an apparent thinness of fur in the inspection area, and it also shows on the skin side in the form of a lot of dark feathery markings. Such a pelt is in danger of being put in a very low grade – perhaps even with the tainted. Therefore, it is well worthwhile to at least comb out the fur.

As previously mentioned, it is very important not to get grease on the fur of a mink during scraping but if it happens an attempt should be made to clean it off. Mink on which the fur is plastered down with grease look so thin that no fur grader in the world would dare to put them anywhere but in the lower grades. Some such mink bought for, say, $15 a pelt have been worth as much as $40 or $50 by the time they came back from the dressers.

When cleaning mink, hard friction of any kind must be avoided, as it may singe the top hair. Also, under no circumstances should flour be used, as some of it is sure to remain and lighten the color of the underfur. Fine, hardwood sawdust may be all right if all removed afterwards; otherwise it has the same effect as flour.

Of course, later in the season, especially when some pelts are all muddy, cleaning can be a little more strenuous. By then, there are no longer any top-priced, fine pelts and removing mud, for instance, can only result in improvement.

Weasel, or ermine, is one fur in which superficial appearance is almost everything, providing there is no damage. There have been at least two dealers on the Prairies who used to make their year's warehouse expenses out of rehandling weasel. Of course, this was in the days of big production of long-tails but, on the other hand, the price levels were pretty low then.

As explained earlier, the difference between a weasel with one limited bloodstain on its shoulder and a pelt that is clean is usually 40 or 50 cents for a short-tail, and may be several times that for a long-tailed weasel. The same applies to any other type of stain or discoloration on either the fur or skin side. Therefore, I strongly advocate a thorough washing, and even scrubbing, of both the fur and skin of ermine.

Mending

Earlier I explained that the manufacturers' usual method of "damaging out" pelts is to extend a hole in two directions by cutting out two little triangles and then sewing the two edges of the slit together to make a straight seam. There is no reason why this same procedure should not be carried out on a raw pelt before it has been placed on the stretcher for drying. No one would suggest that it would be worthwhile on a muskrat, squirrel, or even an ermine. However, on any of the long-haired furs, especially the more valuable ones such as lynx, white fox and marten, it is usually well worth the effort. The same applies to beaver and, sometimes, to mink.

Any buyer is repelled by a gaping hole, even if it is only a small one. Notwithstanding my earlier remarks on broken fur patterns, a straight seam is far more acceptable than a hole, especially if the fur around the seam is cleaned up. Incidentally, the thread of the stitches will probably bind down some of the fur to the skin. If this is picked out carefully with a needle, the seam will not be so obvious.

It is preferable to do any mending while a skin is still green and before it is stretched. After the skin is dry, the area around the mend must be thoroughly wetted and the pelt restretched to get rid of all wrinkles caused by the seam and to help the surrounding fur come together over the stitching. The object is not to deceive a buyer but to let the pelt be evaluated as it really is, rather than heavily impaired by obvious damage.

Nothing much can be done about tainting damage, as it is usually widespread. However, if a pelt has a small bare patch, and the fur surrounding it is absolutely firm and tight, it is usually worthwhile to cut out the bare patch and mend the skin, as for a shot hole. Sometimes, in fact, the bare patch is not really tainted but is due to some other cause.

Martens that mice have nibbled over a fair-sized area are seldom worth bothering to fix. I have seen pelts where this part was cut out and another piece of

undamaged fur was sewn in. This does improve the appearance but it does not increase the value much; the damage is still obvious because it is practically impossible to match the colors.

Sometimes I have seen bits of skin or even glue put over small seams on beaver, in an effort to hide them. This, also, is a waste of time as the chances are a million to one against it not being noticed!

Stretching and Drying

Providing the skin has been properly scraped there should not be too much trouble in getting pelts thoroughly dried. However, certain types are often received at auction sales before they are thoroughly dry – namely, coyote, bear, beaver and occasionally muskrat pelts.

There is little excuse for this, and it only occurs when a trapper is in too much of a rush and cannot even wait the comparatively short time required for proper drying.

Coyotes have a thicker and oilier skin than foxes or lynx and their pelts take longer to dry. Most trappers leave them skin out until almost dry and then turn them fur out before the head gets hard (otherwise it would have to be soaked again and restretched for the final drying).

The pelts of bears and of beavers, especially, are deceptive. If dried in a cold place, they may appear to be dry when actually some spots are still wet but just frozen. Once they have thawed, such pelts will mold very quickly, and have to be recleaned, and there is a great risk of tainting. This is especially true if they are left in a package or bundle in a warm place. The dampness allows harmful bacteria to increase and these attack the skin around the roots of the hair, with the result that the fur comes out in handfuls and the pelt is worthless.

Another thing, if a beaver, particularly, is taken off the boards or stretcher before it is dry, it will shrink – and size, in this fur, means dollars. In addition, usually only certain areas are wet, and these will become so twisted and wrinkled that they disfigure the appearance of even the best pelts.

Poorly dried pelts are either put in with the damaged ones or sold with other similar pelts. In any case, they bring a very low price, since buyers claim most of them will fall to pieces during dressing.

While on the subject of drying, I should mention "frost-drying." In this process – one that I do not recommend – a pelt is dried outside in the cold to give it a whiter skin. However, the whiteness is not a regular, true color, as it tends to be mottled with darker streaks.

Frost-drying has been used sometimes in the past, in an attempt to disguise a blue skin on a beaver, but the whiteness is so intense that it is easily distinguishable from that of a seasonable pelt dried normally. Most buyers are prejudiced against frost-dried pelts, which are seldom seen nowadays, except very occasionally in beaver, and in squirrel in the Yukon area and some parts of British Columbia.

Indian couple skinning and stretching their catch

A very important aspect of drying is to stretch the skin enough, but not too much. The fur on an understretched pelt may seem to be of better quality than most, because it has more top hairs and underfur fibers per square inch. However, any benefit gained in this way will quickly be offset if the pelt ends up in the Medium and Small category instead of X-Large and Large. Similarly, the improperly dried beaver pelts referred to above nearly always seem to have good-quality fur – but they lose a great deal in other respects.

On the other hand, overstretching is just as bad or worse, since it inevitably weakens the fur. An additional inch or two will not add to the value of a pelt, anyway, unless with normal stretching it would be just under, say, a Medium or a Large Medium. And, even if a size is gained, this will be offset by a drop of one or two grades in quality. This often happens to beaver from certain northern areas and to the smaller sizes of beaver from all over the country. It is easier to overstretch these pelts, since their skin is much thinner than most.

It is very easy also to overstretch some of the long-haired furs, especially fox and marten. The skin is usually thinner around the shoulders than anywhere else, and this is the last place one would want to lower the quality, especially in later pelts. There is far more to be lost by weakening the shoulders than could possibly be gained from an extra inch or two in length. The same is true of muskrats, in which overstretching affects the firmness and weight of the skin, especially between the shoulders in spring pelts.

If it were possible to shrink up the neck of a springy lynx or coyote without affecting the rest of the pelt, something might possibly be gained – but this would be pretty difficult. There is no doubt, however, that overstretching a springy pelt accentuates the weakness and makes it worse.

Wild mink are not often overstretched, but if they are it is the butt end that suffers most and the fur appears thin in the inspection area.

Thoroughly seasonable squirrel and weasel will take a good stretch, and size strongly affects value. However, they must never be stretched enough to feel papery, as to a buyer this indicates weak fur. Squirrel and weasel that are not thoroughly seasonable usually have thin enough pelts as it is, and it is better to understretch than overstretch them.

One more point on stretching: in long-haired furs, such as lynx, fox and wolf, sometimes pelts that have been put on a board carelessly are stretched out of shape. Some of the belly fur may be on the side, which should be all back fur, or vice versa, and occasionally a whole skin is twisted. This is most undesirable, since the only misshapen pelts like these that a buyer is used to seeing usually have a large part of the back actually missing and have been sewn up (such pelts are graded as Badly Damaged or Pieces, of course). Furthermore, these twisted pelts draw attention to the weaker, side portions of a pelt and give the impression of poorer quality.

Pelts handled in this way seldom find their way into good lots, let alone the best, and all for the lack of a few seconds extra care.

Shape – It is pretty difficult to generalize on a correct ratio of width to length in stretch, as it differs greatly for the different kinds of fur.

Furthermore, since a trapper is likely to have a fairly standard-sized board or stretcher, a red fox, for instance, may be stretched the same width as another one and yet be 2 or 3 inches longer. However, it might be said that a typical western red fox of about 32 inches in length would probably be about 7 to 7 1/2 inches wide near the butt – measured on the skin, not the fur, of course. Width at the shoulders should not taper off more than about 1 inch from the width lower down.

If a pelt 32 inches long was only 6 to 6 1/2 inches wide, it would look rather narrow. Similarly, if a 27-inch fox was stretched to 7 1/2 inches wide, or more, it would definitely look too wide and a trapper would lose out on its value.

Coyotes also have a width-to-length ratio of about 1 to 4. Pelts, say 40 to 44 inches long, would be about 11 inches wide near the bottom and would taper off about 1 inch, to about 10 inches at the shoulders.

Lynx seem to be stretched a little more narrow, in proportion, than coyotes and red foxes, but, probably because their fur is relatively longer, they look just about the same. A width of 8 1/2 to 9 inches is about average for pelts running from 37 to 42 inches long. A tendency towards narrow necks found in some lynx pelts should be avoided at all costs, as it makes them look poorer than they actually are. Width at the shoulders should not be more than 1 inch or, at the very most, 1 1/2 inches less than the width at the butt.

White fox, on the other hand, are usually stretched wider than the 1 to 4 ratio, with a 7 to 7 1/2 inch width being quite normal for a pelt 25 to 27 inches long.

There is a tendency for some marten of ordinary size to be stretched too long, especially in parts of British Columbia. A ratio of 1 to 4 1/2 or 5, width to length, might be taken as a rough guide, with any pelt over 20 inches long having a minimum width of 4 to 4 1/2 inches.

It should again be emphasized that, although understretching a pelt lengthwise does tend to improve its apparent quality, this does not necessarily increase its value. If too much length is lost, the pelt may be graded one size smaller than it would have been if stretched to its proper length. Conversely, overstretching lengthwise almost inevitably drops the pelt a grade in quality, and little is gained if the pelt appears too narrow in proportion.

Most of the short-haired furs are narrower, proportionately, than the long-haired ones. For instance, a mink pelt 20 to 26 inches long may be only 3 3/4 to 4 inches wide and taper only about 1/4 inch from butt to shoulders.

A western weasel 15 to 16 inches long probably needs to be no more than 2 1/4 to 2 3/4 inches wide to look right, although another 1/4 inch would be good if it can be obtained without the pelt dropping a size in length. In the same way, a short-tailed weasel 12 to 13 inches long looks quite alright with a width of 2 to 2 1/4 inches.

Too great a width, especially in western furs, does not look normal in Canada. Such stretching is seldom seen except in the United States. Too great a taper, and anything approaching a triangle, is absolutely out for the same reason. In short-haired furs, the taper to the shoulders should never be more than 1/4 to 1/2 inch, even in a western pelt. Very narrow pelts always look terrible and will always be downgraded for size even more than is warranted.

To look right, a squirrel pelt should have about the same proportions as a fox or coyote, with the length about four times the width. Pelts 10 to 11 inches long are usually 2 1/4 to 2 3/4 inches wide.

In some parts of northeastern Saskatchewan and the Yukon, squirrel are stretched very wide. These are exceptionally big pelts to start with and can stand this, whereas others of ordinary size could not.

Muskrat are a law unto themselves. In some eastern areas, they are "bow-stretched" on a bent stick. One sometimes see pelts in which the cut has been made so that the rear end of the belly remains attached to the end of the back, giving an impression of very large size. Unfortunately, of course, this makes it obvious that part of the belly is missing and this isn't good, since it is all used.

Muskrat pelts in some parts of northeastern Manitoba are stretched extremely wide, probably as wide as they are long. This gives them an appearance of exceptional quality, perhaps a little more than they actually have. However, any buyer not used to this type of stretch would probably underestimate them on account of their size.

Trappers in some parts of northern Alberta tend to stretch muskrat too narrow and, especially, tapering too much towards the shoulders and the head. A pelt stretched in the proportion of about 1 to 2 1/2 or 3 – width to length – is probably acceptable in most areas, or, for example, 6 inches wide and 14 to 16 inches long. A taper of about 3/4 inch would be about normal.

All the above measurements are of the skin, not the fur. The butt measurements for large-animal pelts are taken 3 to 4 inches from the tail; for small, at about the tail. Shoulder measurements are taken an inch or two behind the actual shoulders.

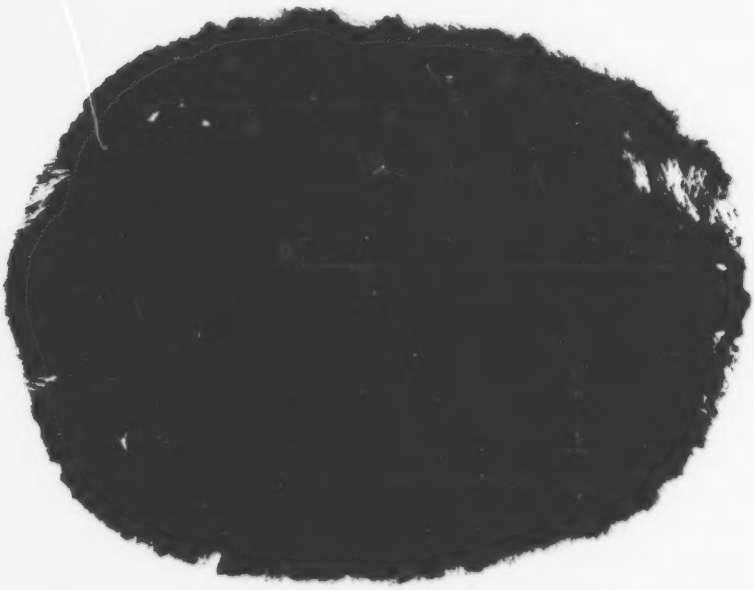
The shape of a pelt is probably more important in beaver than in any other kind of fur, at any rate for its direct effect on value. For instance, quite apart from overstretching or understretching, it is possible to make two identical pelts measure 64 inches (length plus width), which is only an X Large beaver, or 66 inches, which is a good XX Large. This is done simply by stretching them in a different shape – but not diamond or any other shape unacceptable to buyers.

Some people have advocated a circular stretch for years and others favor one that is almost oblong in shape. However, oval is the shape most acceptable for beaver, and the one that gives the largest measurement.

It is true that some buyers may pay an extra dollar or two for round or oblong pelts; but I have still to see a single instance where they paid an XXL price

for a pelt that measured only XL, regardless of the shape. At today's prices this can easily be a difference of $6 or $7 and a trapper who stretches beaver round or oblong instead of oval is just throwing money away.

If you want to prove this yourself, take some sheets of brown paper and make three rough drawings, one circular (I), one oblong (II), and one oval (III). The dimensions of III, width across the widest part plus length from butt edge to eyeholes, should total about 66 inches, and of I and II about 64 inches each. Since II is oblong, simply calculate its area (square inches) by multiplying length by width.



A fine beaver pelt

Now, to find out how many square inches there are in each shape:

For I and III, draw the largest oblong that will fit into each drawing and multiply length by width to get square inches of area. Next, draw four more oblongs to fill up the spaces outside the sides of the first oblong as much as possible, and calculate the area of these. Finally cut a number of 1-inch squares of cardboard and see how many of these you can still fit into the remaining space. You will probably need to cut some of these squares in half to get 1/2-square-inch oblongs or diagonally to get 1/2-square-inch triangles in order to fill up all the spaces and to get a reasonably accurate figure.

Now total everything up and you will find that there are definitely more square inches in the round or oblong figures even though they don't rate XXL

dimensions. Yet the acceptable oval shape, which covers the smallest area, measures the best – 66 inches! I have never known anyone who was not convinced after doing this simple little experiment.

There are several other shapes that are sometimes used and all of them are bad. First, there is the long, very narrow strip stretch – probably the worst of all.

Then there is the fishtail – an oval stretch with a narrow oblong stretching out in the rear. This is no good for a trapper, since the measurement is taken only in a line with a continuation of the curve of the sides so that the extra piece is ignored and is a total loss to him.

Very occasionally the projection is at the head end, with the body roundish in shape, so that a bottle effect is produced. The same applies to these as to the fishtails.

I referred earlier to diamond-shaped beaver and, since such pelts are measured by the shortest cross measurement, at any rate for width, there is a loss here, too, to trappers. So, all in all, it is much the best for trappers to stick to the normal, straightforward, oval stretch.

To sum up, I would say that any departure from normal shape in any type of pelt is to be avoided. As you may have gathered by this time, a buyer is a very uncompromising kind of a fellow. Anything that looks a little different is suspect, and since time is always short he will not waste it trying to figure out whether something that does not conform with the norm is really just as good. He gives himself the benefit of the doubt and will automatically downgrade such odd pelts for quality or size.

I cannot overemphasize the desirability of checking the offerings at auctions, whenever possible, in order to get a clear idea of the standards used in handling pelts in any given district.

Stiffness – A dressed fur always looks and feels much better than a raw one. This is partly because it is clean and therefore the fullness and denseness of the fur is totally apparent. It is also largely because the skin is soft instead of stiff, and this suppleness makes the whole pelt feel very luxuriant. Is there any way to take advantage of this second factor to improve the appearance of raw furs? Unfortunately, there is not as much as one might think.

Russian sables from Kamchatka in Eastern Siberia used to be understretched and then "leathered," or semi-dressed, so that they appeared as little balls of soft silky fur. All wild mink from the best areas of Labrador used to have the skin leathered, or the stiffness worked out with someone's hands. Though still shown skin out, this made the quality of the fur look wonderful. The method was also used for some years by mink ranchers in Quebec. However, its use was restricted to isolated areas where everyone handled their pelts in the same way. It is doubtful whether widespread handling of Canadian furs in this way would be desirable. Buyers are attracted to healthy, fresh-looking, seasonable wild pelts with a fairly stiff skin.

Sometimes one sees a stale fox or marten pelt that seems to have softened up, either through handling or just because whatever it was that gave the original body to the leather has been broken down (perhaps by bacteriological action). These pelts are definitely not attractive to buyers.

Packing

Raw furs are a delicate product and can be spoiled or damaged very easily – more easily, in fact, than after dressing. Here are a few do's and don'ts:

- Don't put the fur of one pelt onto the skin of another (for instance, in beaver or especially hair seal), where oil or grease may get onto the fur and dirty or stain it. Also, in a long-haired fur, some of the top hair may even stick to the skin of another pelt and pull out when separated from it.
- Pack beaver and sealskins fur to fur and skin to skin, matching size as nearly as possible so that the edges don't get stained – pack both these furs flat.
- Don't pack clean furs (such as white fox or hair seal) next to greasy ones, as the grease may come off and cause staining.
- Don't pack any pelt, or even put it next to another, unless it is absolutely dry.
- Don't fold lynx, fox, coyote, marten or other pelts, if you can avoid it. Don't *ever* fold a beaver, otter, or hair seal under *any* circumstances, as the skin will be permanently affected and may even crack in dressing.
- If you have to, you can roll beaver and hair seal, but don't if you can help it. Rolling is infinitely preferable to folding, as it doesn't damage the skin. However, it takes a long time to work out the roll and it is a nuisance to all.
- Make a list and check the furs you are packing before you start doing so. It is a good idea to enclose one copy of this list in the package as a packing list, to send another by mail, and to keep one.
- Pack all furs in boxes, bags or canvas to protect them against pilferage and to keep them from getting wet if snow gets on the packages and then melts later.
- If you are packing furs in canvas and sewing it up, be careful not to put the needle through any of the furs themselves, as the skin may be torn, or the fur pulled, when the package is opened.
- Don't rope any packages so tightly that the rope will bite into the furs and leave permanent marks on the skin or fur. Put cardboard under ropes to protect the furs.
- Make sure the package is well addressed and don't forget to add your own name and address as sender.

METRIC CONVERSION TABLE

Approximate conversions to metric measures

When You Know	Multiply by	To Find	Symbol
LENGTH			
inches	2.5	centimetres	cm
feet	0.3	metres	m
yards	0.9	metres	m
miles	1.6	kilometres	km
AREA			
square inches	6.5	square centimetres	cm^2
square feet	0.09	square metres	m^2
square yards	0.8	square metres	m^2
square miles	2.6	square kilometres	km^2
acres	0.4	hectares	ha
MASS			
ounces	28	grams	g
pounds	0.45	kilograms	kg
short tons (2000 lb)	0.9	tonnes	*t*
VOLUME			
fluid ounces	28	millilitres	ml
pints	0.57	litres	*l*
quarts	1.14	litres	*l*
gallons	4.5	litres	*l*
cubic feet	0.03	cubic metres	m^3
cubic yards	0.76	cubic metres	m^3
TEMPERATURE (exact)			
Fahrenheit		Celsius	°C

°F − 32 × 5/9 = °C

CONVERSION TABLE - CELSIUS - FAHRENHEIT

°C	°F	°C	°F	°C	°F
43.4	110	26.7	80	10.0	50
42.8	109	26.2	79	9.4	49
42.2	108	25.6	78	8.9	48
41.7	107	25.0	77	8.3	47
41.2	106	24.4	76	7.8	46
40.6	105	23.9	75	7.2	45
40.0	104	23.4	74	6.7	44
39.4	103	22.8	73	6.1	43
38.9	102	22.2	72	5.5	42
38.3	101	21.7	71	5.0	41
37.8	100	21.1	70	4.4	40
37.2	99	20.6	69	3.9	39
36.7	98	20	68	3.3	38
36.2	97	19.5	67	2.8	37
35.6	96	18.9	66	2.2	36
35.0	95	18.3	65	1.7	35
34.5	94	17.8	64	1.1	34
34.0	93	17.2	63	0.6	33
33.4	92	16.7	62	0	32
32.8	91	16.2	61	-0.6	31
32.2	90	15.6	60	-1.1	30
31.7	89	15.0	59	-1.7	29
31.2	88	14.5	58	-2.2	28
30.6	87	13.9	57	-2.8	27
30.0	86	13.3	56	-3.3	26
29.4	85	12.8	55	-3.9	25
28.9	84	12.2	54	-4.4	24
28.4	83	11.7	53	-5.0	23
27.8	82	11.1	52	-5.5	22
27.2	81	10.5	51	-6.1	21

°C	°F	°C	°F	°C	°F
-6.7	20	-21.7	-5	-36.7	-34
-7.2	19	-22.2	-8	-37.2	-35
-7.8	18	-22.8	-9	-37.8	-36
-8.3	17	-23.3	-10	-38.3	-37
-8.9	16	-23.9	-11	-38.9	-38
-9.4	15	-24.4	-12	-39.4	-39
-10.0	14	-25.0	-13	-40	-40
-10.5	13	-25.6	-14	-40.6	-41
-11.1	12	-26.1	-15	-41.1	-42
-11.7	11	-26.7	-16	-41.7	-43
-12.2	10	-27.2	-17	-42.2	-44
-12.8	9	-27.8	-18	-42.8	-45
-13.3	8	-28.3	-19	-43.3	-46
-13.9	7	-28.9	-20	-43.9	-47
-14.5	6	-29.4	-21	-44.4	-48
-15.0	5	-30.0	-22	-45	-49
-15.6	4	-30.6	-23	-45.6	-50
-16.2	3	-31.1	-24	-46.1	-51
-16.7	2	-31.7	-25	-46.7	-52
-17.2	1	-32.2	-26		
-17.8	0	-32.8	-27		
-18.3	-1	-33.3	-28		
-18.9	-2	-33.9	-29		
-19.4	-3	-34.4	-30		
-20.0	-4	-35.0	-31		
-20.5	-5	-35.6	-32		
-21.1	-6	-36.1	-33		